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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings of a survey study examining the efforts of southern states and the District of Columbia to implement the goals and action steps of the Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South. Surveys were sent to the members of the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care, appointed by the governors of 16 southern states and the mayor of the District of Columbia. Florida's response was not received in time for publication; Delaware did not participate in the survey because their position to the Task Force was vacant; and Virginia declined to participate. The report includes a copy of the survey introduction and instruction as well as a chart displaying the results of state implementation. The findings are reported as "action step completed," "action taken toward goal," or "no action reported." The goals relate to: (1) funding for direct child care assistance; (2) broadening child care eligibility and subsidy policies; (3) aggressively implementing outreach initiatives; (4) maintaining uncomplicated and family friendly child care application and redetermination processes; (5) establishing a coordinated, seamless eligibility system; (6) establishing customer service outcome goals and setting standards to ensure respectful treatment for families; (7) designing the subsidy system; (8) creating partnerships with employers; (9) providing child care assistance through federal and state tax laws; and (10) having an effective, coordinated system to guide policy decisions and direct use of resources. The bulk of the report presents the survey feedback for each state and the District of Columbia. Information provided for each state includes the name and contact information for the individual completing the survey. (KB)

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Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families

Survey Results on the Status of State Implementation Efforts

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February 2002

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SOUTHERN REGIONAL INITIATIVE ON CHILD CARE

Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families

Survey Results on the Status of State Implementation Efforts

February 2002

List of States Responding

Alabama
Arkansas
District of Columbia
Georgia
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
North Carolina
Oklahoma
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
West Virginia

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of State Implementation Efforts

Background

The Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South expresses the position of the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care that bold action is needed to make child care financial aid available and accessible for low-income parents who need and seek it. The 10 goals and 52 action steps call on public and private sector leaders to support specific initiatives, including significant increases in child care resources, eligibility simplification, improved customer service, implementation of tax strategies and creation of employer partnerships.

The Southern Institute on Children and Families conducted this survey to provide states the opportunity to report efforts made toward the implementation of the Action Plan goals and action steps outlined in the *Sound Investments* report.

The surveys were sent to Task Force members appointed by the Governors of 16 southern states and the mayor of the District of Columbia. A response was not received from Florida in time for publication. Delaware's position to the Task Force has been vacant since January 2001 thus Delaware did not participate in the survey. In January 2000, Virginia declined to participate as a member of the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care and thus no information is included on Virginia.

Survey respondents were asked to complete each section of the survey by entering actions taken on or after January 2000. For actions addressed prior to January 1, 2000 respondents were asked to include an approximate date of implementation. A copy of the survey introduction and instructions are included in this report.

Also included is a chart that displays the results of state implementation efforts at a glance. Results are reported as **"Action Step Completed," "Action Taken Toward Goal," or "No Action Reported."** Respondents were asked to enter N/A or "Not Applicable" if no action was taken to accomplish the action step. Action steps reported by states as completed prior to January 1, 2000 are presented in bold and italics. States do not appear on the chart if no response was entered on the survey. The following state reports reflect implementation efforts as of September 2001.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey of Implementation Efforts

Survey Introduction:

This survey is being conducted by the Southern Institute on Children and Families to identify the status of efforts being made to implement the Goals and Action Steps outlined in the December 2000 report of the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care, titled *Sound Investments: Financial Support for Child Care Builds Workforce Capacity and Promotes School Readiness*. The survey is being sent to Task Force members appointed by Governors of 16 southern states and the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

We have created the survey in an electronic format to facilitate the entry and tabulation of responses. Please enter the status of your state's implementation efforts under each action step and return the survey to us no later than Monday, September 24th. We will greatly appreciate receiving responses earlier, but we recognize that you will need to engage a number of persons in the preparation of your responses.

Survey responses will be included in a report to be distributed at the Southern Regional Forum on Child Care on October 10-11, 2001 in Atlanta. It is our intent to print your status comments as written. In the event we do not receive your response, a notation will indicate that the information is not available. **Please be advised that we will be unable to include status comments received after September 24 in the report.**

The time frame for your responses should reflect actions taken on or after January 1, 2000. If your state has already addressed the action step, please note the action taken and the approximate date. Questions regarding the survey should be directed to Zenovia Vaughn, Deputy Director for Child Care at (803) 779-2607 or zenovia@kidsouth.org.

Survey Instructions:

The survey is a "Microsoft Word™ for Windows" document. Enter your responses in the appropriate text boxes, save a copy of the file for your personal records, and e-mail the completed Word™ document to Zenovia Vaughn at zenovia@kidsouth.org.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care
Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South
State Implementation Status

GOAL 1: Federal, state, local and private funds should be sufficient to meet 100% of need for direct child care assistance, based on initial eligibility levels at 85% of the state median income. Redetermination levels should allow families to retain child care assistance until they reach 100% of the state median income.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
1.1. Educate federal and state policy makers on the need for action.		AL, AR, DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, WV	
1.2. Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.		AL, AR, DC, GA, KY, MD, MS, NC, ***OK***, SC, TN, TX	LA, MO
1.3. Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
1.4. Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.		AL, AR, DC, GA, KY, MD, MS, MO, OK, SC, TN, WV	LA, NC, TX
1.5. Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.		AL, AR, DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, WV	

GOAL 2: States and communities should broaden their child care eligibility and subsidy policies to meet the economic, work and education needs of families.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
2.1. Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.	AL, DC, GA, KY, MD, MS, MO, ***NC***, SC, ***WV***	OK, TN	AR, LA, TX
2.2. Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines. (A state's definition of "student" may include but is not limited to adults in school full-time or job training programs. See state status reports for complete descriptions.)	AL, AR, ***DC***, KY, ***LA***, MD, MS, MO, ***NC***, SC, TN, ***WV***	GA, OK, TX	
2.3. Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.	AR, DC, ***OK***, SC	AL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, TN, WV	TX
2.4. Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.	***AL***, AR, ***DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, WV***		
2.5. Index income eligibility levels for inflation.	AR, MD, SC	DC, NC, TN	AL, GA, KY, LA, MS, MO, OK, TX

Notes:

- State respondents were asked to report actions taken on or after January 1, 2000. For actions addressed prior to January 1, 2000, respondents were asked to provide an approximate date. Respondents were asked to enter "N/A" or "Not Applicable" if no action was taken. Action Steps reported by states as completed prior to January 1, 2000 are presented in bold and italics.
- Data is not reported for Florida, Delaware and Virginia. A response was not received from Florida in time for publication. Delaware's position to the Task force has been vacant since January 2001 thus Delaware did not participate in the survey. In January 2000, Virginia declined to participate as a member of the Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care and thus no information is included on Virginia.
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Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care
Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South
State Implementation Status

GOAL 3: Outreach initiatives should be designed and aggressively implemented to assure that families have accessible and easy-to-understand information on child care assistance and are provided assistance in applying.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
3.1. Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.	AL, DC, KY, MD, MS, MO, TX, WV	AR, ***GA***, LA, NC, OK, SC, TN	
3.2. Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.		AL, AR, DC, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, SC, TX	GA, OK, TN
3.3. Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.	AR, MD, MS, SC, ***WV***	DC, KY, LA, MO, NC, OK, TX	AL, GA, TN
3.4. Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.	AL, AR, DC, ***GA*** MS, MO, OK, SC, TX, WV	KY, LA, MD, NC, TN	
3.5. Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.	DC, MD, MO, SC, TX	AL, AR, KY, ***LA***, MS, NC, OK, TN, ***WV***	GA
3.6. Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.	AL, AR, DC, MO, ***OK***, SC, TX, ***WV***	KY, ***LA***, MD, MS, NC	GA, TN

GOAL 4: The child care application and redetermination processes should be uncomplicated and family friendly.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
4.1. Simplify applications for child care assistance.	AL, ***DC***, MD, MS, MO, ***OK***, SC, ***TX***	AR, GA, KY, LA, NC	TN
4.2. Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.	AR, ***TX***	AL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, ***OK, SC***	DC, TN
4.3. Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.	AL, DC, MD, MO, ***OK***	AR, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TX	TN
4.4. Provide applications at multiple sites.	AL, AR, DC, MO, OK, ***TX***	GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, WV	TN
4.5. Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.		AL, DC, GA, KY, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, ***SC,*** TN, TX	AR, LA
4.6. Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.		AR, GA, KY, LA, MS, OK, SC, TX	AL, DC, MD, MO, NC, TN
4.7. Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.	KY, ***LA, MD,*** MS, MO, ***NC, OK, SC, TX***	AL, AR	DC, GA, TN
4.8. Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.	AL, AR, ***DC, GA***, MD, ***NC, TX***, WV	KY, MO, SC, TN	LA, MS, OK

Notes:

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Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care
Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South
State Implementation Status

Action Steps (continued)	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
4.9. Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.	DC, GA, KY, MO, ***NC, OK***, SC	AR, LA, MD, TN, TX	AL, MS
4.10. Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.	***DC***	AL, AR, KY, LA, MD, MO, NC, OK, SC, WV	GA, MS, TN, TX

GOAL 5: Establish a coordinated, seamless eligibility system so that funding sources are invisible to families and support continuity of child care.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
5.1. Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.	AL, ***DC***, GA, KY, MD, MS, ***MO, NC, OK, TX, WV***	AR, SC	LA, TN
5.2. Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.	***DC***	AR, GA, KY, ***MD***, MS, NC, SC, TX	AL, LA, MO, OK, TN, WV
5.3. Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.	***DC***, KY, MD, NC, ***OK***, ***SC***, ***TX***	AL, AR, GA, MS, TN	LA, MO
5.4. Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.	***DC***, MD, MS, MO, ***NC***, SC	AL, AR, ***GA***, KY, LA, ***OK***, TN, TX, WV	

GOAL 6: Establish customer service outcome goals and set standards to ensure that all families are treated with dignity and respect and are served in an efficient manner.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
6.1. Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.	***DC***, SC	AL, AR, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, OK, TX, WV	NC, TN
6.2. Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.	DC	AL, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, OK, SC, TX, WV	AR, GA, NC, TN
6.3. Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.		AR, DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, MO, NC, ***OK***, SC, TN, TX, WV	AL, MS
6.4. Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.	AL, ***AR***, ***DC***, GA, MO, WV	KY, ***LA***, MD, MS, NC, ***OK***, SC, TN, TX	

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Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care
Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South
State Implementation Status

GOAL 7: Design the subsidy system so that rate structures assure that families receiving child care assistance have access to all types of child care and disallow charges above established co-payments.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
7.1. States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.	AR, KY, ***MD***, MS, OK, SC, WV	AL, DC, GA, LA, MO, NC, TN, TX	
7.2. Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.	AR, DC, KY, MO, SC, ***WV***	AL, GA, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, TN, TX	
7.3. Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.	AR, ***DC***, ***OK***, TX, WV	MO	AL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, TN

GOAL 8: Create partnerships with employers to expand child care assistance for working families.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
8.1. Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.	GA, MD, ***TX***, WV	AL, AR, DC, KY, MS, SC, TN	LA, MO, NC, OK
8.2. Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.	TX	AL, AR, ***DC***, KY, MD, SC	GA, LA, MS, MO, NC, OK, TN
8.3. Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.	AR, MD, TX, WV	AL, DC, GA, KY, MS, MO, SC, TN	LA, NC, OK
8.4. Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.		AL, AR, DC, KY, MD, SC, TN, TX	GA, LA, MS, MO, NC, OK
8.5. Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.	***GA***, MD, MS, TN	AL, AR, ***DC***, SC, TX	KY, LA, MO, NC, OK
8.6. Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.	MD, ***TX***	AR, SC, TN	AL, DC, GA, KY, LA, MS, MO, NC, OK
8.7. Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.	DC, MS, TX	AR, KY, SC	AL, GA, LA, MD, MO, NC, OK, TN

GOAL 9: Provide child care assistance to working families through federal and state tax laws.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
9.1. Make the federal child and dependent care tax credit refundable.	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

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Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care
Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South
State Implementation Status

Action Steps (continued)	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
9.2. Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.	***AR***, DC	AL	GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC,
9.3. Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care. According to the National Women's Law Center, the Child Tax Credit will increase to $600 beginning 2001 and will further increase to $1,000 by year 2010.[1]		AL, KY, MD	AR, DC, GA, LA, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX
9.4. Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.		AL, KY	AR, DC, GA, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX
9.5. Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.	DC, KY		AL, AR, GA, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX
9.6. Encourage the use of efficient state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.	***GA***	AR, KY, MD, TX	AL, DC, LA, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN

GOAL 10: States should have effective, coordinated systems to guide child care and early childhood policy decisions and direct use of resources.

Action Steps	Action Step Completed	Action Taken Toward Goal	No Action Reported
10.1. Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.	AR, ***DC***	GA, KY, LA, MD, MO, SC, TX, WV	AL, MS, NC, OK, TN
10.2. All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.[2]		AL, AR, DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, WV	

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[1] Source: National Women's Law Center, 2001, "New Tax Law's Expansion of the Partial Refundability of the Child Tax Credit Benefits Millions of Women and their Children," Washington, DC.

[2] Although not exclusive to the South, all southern states and the District of Columbia participate in an effort to collect common data elements as required by Federal regulations.

Notes:

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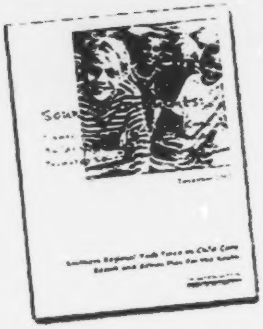

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts

September 2001

Your State:	Alabama
Your Name:	Jeanetta E. Green
Your Job Title:	Program Manager
Name of Agency:	Alabama Department of Human Resources
Mailing Address:	P O Box 304000 50 Ripley Street Montgomery, AL 36130
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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Many national organizations including the Education Commission of the States (ECS) are providing the State of Alabama technical assistance on early care and education policy issues. Through a two-year ECS public policy institute on early learning, we are educating state policy makers on the need for action. The advocacy community is working with state agency representatives, the Alabama Partnership for Children and the business community to coordinate our efforts on early care and education issues and to ensure that we are delivering a consistent message to federal and state policy makers.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

The Alabama Partnership for children is working with business, state and nonprofit entities to implement Alabama's strategic plan for children. The business community through APC leads the effort to maximize federal, state and community resources.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

NA

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

In September 2001 the Department created the staff position of Special Projects Coordinator within the child care program. The Special Projects Coordinator functions to research and seek alternative sources of funding for child care including seeking additional sources of state funding. The position was filled effective January 2, 2002.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

The Alabama Partnership for Children (APC), a 501(c)3, has been established to assist the State in full utilization of available resources for children by providing a state structure for public/private partnerships. The APC will initially allow us to bring business together with State Agencies and communities to improve coordination of services and maximize utilization of resources as well as bring new resources to Alabama. Child care assistance is a tremendous issue for families with young children and we plan to help with coordination and resource development through this new nonprofit.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

The average co-payment paid by parents is 8.8% of the gross income. Plans are underway to reduce co-pays by allowing a discount for the second and any subsequent children.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Participation requirements were reduced to an average of 15 hours per week to allow for more participation of students. In addition, full-time students are deemed to meet the participation requirement.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Currently there are no specific income exemptions in place. However, the need for exemptions of some income is being explored.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

There are no asset testing requirements in place in Alabama for eligibility of child care assistance.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

NA

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Information on eligibility for child care subsidies in Alabama are readily available through printed materials from any of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies (CMA) throughout the state and from DHR staff in any of the 67 county DHR offices. In addition CMAs distribute child care eligibility information from resource van visits. General information and some statistics are also available on the Department's web site.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Application information from each of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies (CMAs) is reviewed during programmatic monitoring for content. Regions that serve multi-language populations have some information available in Spanish.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

In our experience this has not been a tremendous issue in Alabama. The process of payment for subsidy and the parents sharing in the cost makes it more difficult for families to be identified as receiving assistance.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

Each of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies maintains a Resource & Referral (R & R) for all licensed and approved exempt providers within their region. The list is made available to each applicant and recipient needing assistance in selecting a child care provider. In addition, pamphlets on choosing child care applicable to a child's age level are provided to parents.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Communication and coordination is being stressed through quality child care initiatives of the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Children's Affairs, and the Alabama Partnership for Children. The Governor appointed a Commission on Early Learning headed by twelve of Alabama's most prominent business leaders to develop a plan for early learning. This Commission made several recommendations in the area of coordination of services.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Through the Kids and Kin Program in partnership with VOICES for Alabama's Children, community and faith-based organizations are helping to identify informal relative care child care providers. These providers are being mentored by child care partners who assist them with all types of resources including information about the subsidy program. They help the relative caregivers work through the paperwork and resources associated with accessing the program. In 2001 several trainings were held for faith-based providers on the States licensing regulations. Subsidy Program information was shared with providers at these training.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

14

The application process completed by the parent has been simplified to a one-page document.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Currently a parent can make application for the waiting list either in person, by phone or by mail.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Applicants are not required to submit duplicate copies of birth certificates, personal IDs, etc. which are already on file from a previous application. Further, income and other documentation provided on client referrals from the TANF, Protective Service and foster care units are deemed to be sufficient verification without requiring additional verification from the parent.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Applications are provided at each main location and satellite office of the 12 CMAs in Alabama, as well as at each county DHR office.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Some of the CMAs in Alabama, especially in urban areas, have extended hours of operation 1-2 nights per week for applying for services and conducting interviews to determine eligibility.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

NA

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

A face to face interview is not required for client cases referred from the protective service, foster care, and TANF agencies.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

Staff at each CMA provides individual consultation to parents when frequent changes of providers are made.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

All certification periods are set at a maximum of six months.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Eligibility can continue for an additional 10 days and up to 20 after the loss of employment, if the parent reports the change in circumstances within 10 days of the occurrence.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

The Departments only funding source for child care is CCDF. Some CMAs receive local funding for subsidized care. Parents that are ineligible for CCDF subsidy and eligible for local funding subsidy are automatically changed to the new funding category without the need to reapply.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

NA

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Some of the CMAs have local funding sources available to provide childcare for higher income caps. Thus, some families who become ineligible for CCDF due to excess income can continue receiving local subsidies.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

The Department works collaboratively with the Department of Children's Affairs, Head Start Collaboration Office and other state agencies that deal with early care issues. In it's RFP for quality services the Department stressed the importance of each funding agency collaboration with state and local early care service providers and resources in their area. Part of the evaluation of submitted proposals focused on the strength of the agency's collaborative efforts.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Alabama contracts with 12 public and private non-profit agencies who provide eligibility determination for child care services. The Department provides policy guidance and technical assistance to caseworkers. Workers in a limited number of the areas are bilingual.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Eligibility caseloads average less 250 cases per worker.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

NA

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

All child care quality enhancement partners work collaboratively with CMAs who provide resource and referral services for the State.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

The Department concluded its market rate survey in July 2001. New rates based on the survey were effective October 1, 2001. The new rates represent an overall 10.3 percent increase from previous rates.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

Providers are reimbursed for up to five (5) days per month regardless of the nature of the absence. In addition, providers are allowed 12 reimbursable closure days and 5 reimbursable day for emergency closures, due to provide illness, death of an immediate family member or inclement weather. Revised chronic absenteeism policy to allow for up to 10 reimbursable days per month when child's absence is due to a documented illness.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

NA

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

The State and advocacy communities are working with the business community on the importance of quality child care for all children. Economic indicators tying quality child care to economic and workforce development are being designed with the support of the Education Commission of the States.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

Business helped developed the strategic plan for early care and education in Alabama. We are working through the Alabama Partnership for Children to educate and develop more business support for early care and education issues.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

Many advocacy organizations are trying to raise the dependent child care tax credit. We also are working to bring the earned income tax credit to the national federal level.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

The Department's Quality Enhancement partnership with the Employers Child Care Alliance in Opelika, AL enables employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

Through a Ford Foundation Grant called Healthy, Wealthy and Wise, VOICES for Alabama's Children is focusing on tax and financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

NA

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

NA

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

For all Action steps under Goal 9, the Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

NA

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

NA

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

NA

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 35% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Governor supported low -income working families by placing $1 million in each year of the biennium for direct services.

A TANF transfer of $12 million will occur by October 1, 2001.
Act 1841- The Child Care for Working Families Act. This places a 3% tax on beer to be used for two areas. The state pre-k (ABC) programs will receive 80% of the revenues. Direct services for low-income working families will receive 20% of the revenues. The estimated revenue is $6.5 million in SFY 2002 and $9.7 million SFY 2003.

Act 1271 established the Early Care Foundation, which will accept and match contributions from private business and individuals for child care. The Department of Human Services will provide $1 million in match funds over the next two years to initiate this project.
We are currently working with Joint House and Senate Education Committees in an interim study. The first addressed early care and education policies and general questions. This study will address early care and education funding. We have provided our Federal Congressional Leaders with data and recommendations.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

Act 1271 established the Early Care Foundation, which will accept and match contributions from private business and individuals for child care. The Department of Human Services will provide $1 million in match funds over the next two years to initiate this project.
The Division in conjunction with the Governor's office will develop an initiative with faith based community leaders to encourage participation in child care in their local communities. The first organizational meeting in October 4, 2001.

The Arkansas Corporate Champions for Children Task Force made recommendations to the Governor before the 2001 Legislative session. As a result ACT 1271 was passed, that established the Foundation for Early Care and Education. This foundation will accept and match contributions from private business and individuals for child care. Foundation resources will be used to enhance quality, affordability, and availability of child care and early education for children in the state.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

Although we have received an increase in Federal funding for the CCDF Block grant it does not allow us to raise our eligibility level to 85% of the state median income. We are currently serving families at, or below 60% of the state median income with a waiting list of 4,631 families.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

State funding was increased this year through two new sources. The Governor supported a $1 million increase in funding in 2002-2003 to address child care accessibility for low-income working families.
Secondly, Act 1841, The Child Care for Working Families Act, was passed that placed a 3 percent retail excise tax on beer. Revenues from this tax are dedicated to child care and early childhood education. The tax is expected to generate $6.6 million during FY 2002 and $9.7 million in FY 2003.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Kids Count Coalition, sponsored by Arkansas Advocates, successfully energized and empowered providers and parents during the last session and they were a large reason that numerous child care bills were passed. Kids Count provided training at the local level on "how to tell the story" and set up an information network to keep everyone on the same page. This is a strong group that will move forward in the 2003 session.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Only 6-7 % of the families pay a co-payment in Arkansas.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

All students (vocational, 2 yr., 4 yr., etc.) qualify in this category with High School students given top priority.

Changes were made in the approved State Plan, which reduce the number of required college hours from 15 per semester to 12.

As TANF transfer money becomes available these families will receive services.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Each adult household member who is employed at least 35 hours per week will have a $100.00 work related deduction made from their gross income to account for withholding and other mandatory work-related expenses.

A Casehead receiving SSI is disregarded.

Other miscellaneous income such as bonuses, income tax returns, insurance settlements, etc. are disregarded.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

We have eliminated the asset test.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

The sliding fee scale was adjusted to reflect the current level of 60% of the state median income.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Applications placed on-line now for use by parents.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

On September 18-20, 2001 our first ESL Academy for Pre-school teachers will be held in conjunction with the State Department of Education. The participants from local communities will be discussing cultural sensitivity and how to engage parents in the local community. Also, utilizing technology to "get the word out" about services we offer will be a strong component of the training.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

We have developed child care information pamphlets for parents regarding all the services offered through the Division. Through the resource and referral agencies information in also given out in a manner that removes the stigma. We have also just completed a Customer Satisfaction survey with parents and providers that strongly. Supports the fact that parents are treated with respect when dealing with DHS and that they are getting their needs met.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

See above answer

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Within the division we have developed a new policy that states that when any application from a new provider comes in that information will be forwarded to the unit administrators and someone will be designated to call the providers and let them know what services are available through the division.

I am also attending all of the Governor's Forums across the state where issues surrounding child care usually come up. I will be able to readily give the participants contact information.

We are also participating in the Arkansas Department of Economic Development forums across the state. The message that child care is a workforce issue is the top priority.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

See answers 3.5 and 1.2.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

We are examining application policies currently.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Applications can be made through all above methods.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

We are examining application policies currently.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Applications are provided at multiple sites including DHS offices, all resource and referral locations and on-line.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Until we begin to receive additional funding from our Legislative efforts this will not be necessary.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

We are examining application policies currently.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

We are examining application policies currently.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

This is currently completed by the caseworker if necessary.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

We are examining application and redetermination policies currently.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

We are examining these policies currently.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

Category changes are made without closure if TEA parents are moving into transitional care.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

We are still working on this.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

We are still working on this.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

We are still working on this.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Efforts have been made to provide professional and well-trained staff. According to the recent Customer Satisfaction Survey parents and providers were pleased.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Our caseloads have been at the same level since September of 1999 due to limited funding. This is not an issue for us.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

See response 3.3 for Customer Satisfaction Survey results.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

Grants have always been provided to support the child care resource and referral organizations.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

We raised reimbursement rates beginning July 1, 2001 to reflect the current market rate survey of rates at the 75th percentile. ($2.6 million increase)

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

State planning process allowed input from providers and community leaders regarding reimbursement policies. Also we made personal contacts with providers during the "market rate survey "period in order to get the price sheets that they were giving to parents.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

We do not allow additional charges.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

See response 1.1 for public private initiative information.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

See response 1.1 for business participation through public private initiative.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

We have developed a "child care kit" that is available to employers that explains all of above plus additional information.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

This is part of the Early Care Foundation Act as well as the Governor's Faith based initiative in conjunction with the Division.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

The Early Care Foundation provides for $ 1million to be utilized for matching funds. See action step 1.1.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

Please see action step 1.1.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

Please see action step 1.1.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

NA

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

Arkansas already does this.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

NA

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

NA

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

We have tax strategies in place currently and will be examining others during the next year for possible Legislative action in 2003.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

We have several collaborative projects in Arkansas. I have listed just a few below:

The Arkansas Early Literacy Learning Training Program for pre-school teachers.

Arkansas Corporate Champions for Children, the public-private initiative.

The English as a Second Language Early Learning Academy for Pre-school teachers.

The state accreditation program.

A comprehensive funding source database including all Arkansas Department of Education funding, the Head Start funding, and

DHS early care and education funding.

The Readiness Initiative which will include setting readiness benchmarks for entry to Kindergarten and developing an assessment tool to evaluate incoming students thirty days prior to entering kindergarten.

Transition initiative.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

NA—Southern Institute data

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Presentation made to Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development and at an April Forum focused on providing services for infants and toddlers on waiting lists. Developed two child care matters briefing documents one focusing on infants and toddlers, and one focusing on compensation, benefits and retention. A profile of child care providers and services document has also been developed. These documents have broadly distributed and have been made accessible at City Council hearings and at meetings and site visits with District and Federal representatives.

There is a monthly meeting of the Children and Youth Investment Action Team, which includes representation from all District government agencies involved with children as well as policy organizations, and community based providers. This group has met for more than a year and every agenda includes items focused on funding and service needs. The Deputy Mayor for Children Youth and Families or her representative participates in these meetings. This group has an annual meeting that includes the Superintendent of Schools and all related District government department directors.

The District of Columbia televised Child Care and Development Fund hearings that were aired several times a day over a four-month period.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

In 1991, under the leadership of a prominent businessperson, a group of businesspersons were organized and an educational process began at that time. Since that time, there have been sessions with the Chamber of Commerce and the Metro Bankers Association. Since 2001, small-facilitated sessions have been held with human resources staff of District of Columbia based businesses. These will continue over the next year. Also in 2001, The District of Columbia Bar Pro Bono Project adopted child care as an area of focus and they will provide periodic workshops on child care issues to lawyers who will provide pro bono services to non-profit providers

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development has been in the forefront of this issue as has DC Agenda and the Children and Youth Investment Action Team.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

In FY 2001, the District of Columbia provided services to 70% of eligible families using all sources of funds.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

- Held two large forums with small group facilitates session at the District of Columbia Convention Center involving parents and child care providers including teachers and teacher assistants.
- Early Childhood Collaborative of the District of Columbia (formed 1991) and the District of Columbia Downtown Child Care Corporation (formed 1999) raised funds to support centers with subsidized children.
- Three groups with Hope Six grants have included child care center and homes in their packages.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

D.C. established a new co-payment system that does not exceed 10% of gross family income and implemented this system in 2001.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

D. C. has provided financial assistance to students since the 1980's.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

The only income that DC counts is earned income.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

D.C. has no asset testing policy to receive child care financial assistance.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Families are eligible up to 250 per cent of the federal poverty level and remain eligible until they reach 300 per cent of FPL. This was implemented in 2001.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

In 2000, D.C. began an extensive our reach campaign which uses TV, Radio, specially created videos, website, community events, flyers, other agencies and mailings. We have created materials in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese. We have a technical assistance contract to work with groups for whom English is not the first language. The Mayor's Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs hosts an annual event and OECD provides a workshop with simultaneous translation in three languages.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Information is tested for reading levels and is in two to five different languages. Video tapes are closed captioned.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

The District of Columbia has professionally designed materials in multiple languages. They appeal to persons of all incomes.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

The District of Columbia has video tapes; print materials and the child care resources and referral service.
OECD intake staff reviews options for service with each parent as does the more than 60 vendors who conduct intake at sites across the District.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

The District of Columbia has coordinated conferences and interagency outreach efforts on an ongoing basis. Each time the Mayor holds a meeting in any section of the District, OECD provides materials on child care. Information is also coordinated with the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development, which meets every other month, and the Children and Youth Investment Action Team, which meets monthly.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Cross training in provided with the public assistance office, the Maternal and Family Health Administration and in special forums organized by OECD to bring government agencies up to date on what we are doing. This also happens at the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development, monthly meetings with the Parent Education Collaborative, with various provider groups, individual sessions at various organizations including faith based institutions; weekly site visits to TANF vendor sites and quarterly training for groups providing employment training.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

The District of Columbia has a simple automated application that we have been using since 1997.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

The District of Columbia currently does not accept filing except in person unless the person is a foster parent. Because we are a small jurisdiction, service can be provided more timely through face-to-face interaction.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

The District of Columbia reviews document requirement on the phone and broadly distributes the two easy steps document, which describes requirements.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

We have mobile eligibility across the District and more than 60 vendors who conduct eligibility at their sites.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

The District of Columbia has evening hours and a toll free number and will make appointments for weekends.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

NA

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

The District of Columbia still requires a face-to-face interview for initial and redetermination except for foster parents and children under protective services. Since we are a small jurisdiction, it appears to be more expeditious to have people apply face to face.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

35

In 1998, the District of Columbia began a special consultation with the parents who requested a third change if child placement in a 12-month period. However, parents are required to put in writing a request for a change of provider and are also encouraged to go back and talk with the provider before changing the child.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

This practice became effective October 1, 2001.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

In 1982, the District of Columbia began providing subsidy for three months for families who lost employment and were already in the subsidy program. The District of Columbia implemented this program in 2001 for persons involved in structured job search.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

The District of Columbia implemented this program in 1990.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

The District of Columbia has implemented a blended Head Start and child care program (1999) and a blended child care and pre-k/title program (1996).

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

The District of Columbia has implemented this concept since1990.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

The District of Columbia has implemented this concept since1990.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

36

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

We provide quarterly eligibility training institutes and have staff and contractors who speak multiple languages.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

The District of Columbia broadly distributes information about documentation required to apply for subsidy. During the telephone pre-screening items required for eligibility are reviewed and follow-up letter with requirements is sent. Appointments save time and people are seen shortly after they arrive for the appointment. The major challenge faced by most parents is obtaining a completed health form.

OECD has no control over this.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

University of the District of Columbia conducts assessments, analyzes data and makes recommendations.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

We fully fund the child care resource and referral service and have since 1991.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

D.C. conducts a market rate survey every two years and establishes a Market Rate Task Force that makes recommendations for rate increases.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

We have established a three tiered reimbursement system with rates based on quality indicators.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

The District of Columbia prohibits providers from charging above the established co-payments. This has been a policy since 1980.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

DC has partnerships with the Chambers of Commerce, the Metro Bankers Association and community development groups. We have groups that have been established by prominent business people in DC since 1991. In 2001, we sponsored facilitated discussions with human resources staff in District of Columbia businesses. One of the major employers in DC has established a Corporate Voices group to educate business people.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

The Early Childhood Collaborative and D.C. Agenda have solicited business champions. These champions have been strong advocates for child care since 1991.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

Information provided to human resources staff in businesses for their use with employees.

OECD has worked with business on a one on one or small group basis since 1987 when the *Child Care Wish List for Businesses* was originally established.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

This is done through the Early Childhood Collaborative, D.C. Downtown Child Care Corporation, the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Metro Bankers Association, and the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

In 1988, the District of Columbia established a series of tax incentives for employers who made child care investments in the Development Zones area of the District. This included incentives for hiring persons from these areas and for providing rent at below market rates.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

D. C. does not have such incentives however, housing and commercial developers have provided child care space for use by businesses in the areas developed since 1988.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

All administration is handled by DHS Office of Early Childhood Development or through the D.C. Child Care Corporation or the Early Childhood Collaborative.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

NA

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

DC implemented a refundable child care tax credit.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

NA

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

NA

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

Joint effort by D.C. Tax and Revenue, DHS Office of Early Childhood Development, the child care resource and referral service and advocate groups such as DC ACT (D. C. Action for Children.

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

DC has not implemented initiatives in this area.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Leadership provided by DHS Office of Early Childhood Development collaborates with the welfare agency, the Employment agency, Parks and Recreation since 1987.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

DC is very interested but has not initiated efforts in this area with other states except Maryland and Virginia. DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia have been collaborating with the Council of Governments of Greater Washington to collect and publish common data since 1981.

40

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Increasing the number of families eligible for subsidies was a Georgia Early Learning Initiative recommendation which was given to the Governor in the fall of 2000. While it was not one of the recommendations chosen for implementation in 2001 it remains on the table.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

In May, 2001, the State Chamber of Commerce endorsed the Georgia Early Learning Initiative at it's annual State Board Meeting.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

NA

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

See 1.1.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Georgians for Children, a statewide child advocacy organization, develops a children's agenda each year to be used by all child advocates during the Legislative session. The agenda for 2002, developed over the summer of 2001, contains three issues related to the availability of child care.

The 14 Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies in Georgia educate their local leaders about the need for child care assistance for low incomes families through one on one meetings, legislative luncheons and breakfasts, and during a special child care day during the legislative session.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Families currently receiving child care subsidies do not have co-payments that exceed 10% of family income.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

High school and Tech school students are eligible at this time.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Georgia does not count TANF, SSI, Food stamps, adoption supplements, tax refunds, relative subsidies, earnings of any child under 18, in determining income eligibility.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Georgia does not test for assets.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

NA

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

The main source of information about subsidies comes from written and verbal information provided by the local CCR&R agencies and the county Departments of Family and Children Services.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

NA

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

NA

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

A statewide network of CCR&Rs provides this service.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

NA

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

NA

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Application is being amended at this time to use simpler language.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

As a direct result of the Southern Institute's report, specifically the chart that shows alternative application processes in other states, the State agency managing subsidies is beginning to explore the possibility of alternative methods for receiving applications for subsidies in Georgia.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Under study at this time.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Applications are only provided at 159 county DFACs offices at this time.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Some county offices are opened during non-traditional hours but it is not a state requirement. There are no toll free phone lines.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

Under study at this time.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

NA

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

Georgia already requires that local child care eligibility staff offer consultation to parents regarding appropriate choices when excessive provider changes are requested.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

This is current Georgia policy.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

NA

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

This is current Georgia policy.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

While applications are not combined, there are good linkages between Pre-K, Head Start, and the subsidy program to provide wrap around services for low income families in Georgia.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

See 5.2..

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

The voluntary, statewide Pre-K program, the Subsidy program and Head Start have been working closely together over the past three years to insure maximization of resources.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

This varies based on the county DFACS office.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

NA

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

This fall, the subsidy program began focus groups with parents on the child care subsidy waiting list to determine how not having a child care subsidy has affected their family.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

Investments in the CCR&R system have tripled in the past year with the addition of funds for an inclusion project and funds to improve and expand family child care.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

Most recent market rate survey was completed in January 2001 but rates fall well below the 75% percentile. However, as part of the Georgia Early Learning Initiative. 5 pilot counties were selected to receive tiered reimbursements based on increased quality, up to 150% of the current rate.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

See 7.1.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

NA

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

The Georgia Child Care Council has developed a presentation for businesses which can be used by CCR&Rs or any community organization to make the case for business support for child care assistance in many forms. Also, the Georgia Early Learning Initiative has developed a presentation, also easily adapted for use with businesses, which explains the importance of a quality early childhood environment for all children.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

NA

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

See 8.1 and 8.5.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

NA

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

Georgia already has a substantial state corporate tax credit for employers who provide on site care or help pay child care costs for their employees.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

NA

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

NA

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

NA

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

NA

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

NA

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

NA

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

See 8.5.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Georgia assumes that any parent eligible for Head Start is eligible for wrap around services financed by the subsidy program. Pre-K has no eligibility policies other than age of the child.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

NA

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Quarterly reports are sent to state agency and legislative members, as well as collaborative partners. Policymakers are included on the Early Childhood Authority and local Early Childhood Councils who assess community/state needs, decide on funding priorities, and work on a comprehensive plan to meet the needs of Kentucky's children. Testimony is also given before Legislative committees.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

The Early Childhood Authority, the local Early Childhood Councils include the business community as members. An Early Childhood Business Council is also being formed as a result of KY's HB 706, which is to involve the corporate community, county judge/executives, and mayors in supporting issues of importance to working families with young children and to collect and disseminate information about the various ways business and local government can become involved in supporting early childhood.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

HB 706 also mandates that the Cabinet for Families and Children shall evaluate at least annually the adequacy of the childcare subsidy to enable low income families in need of childcare services to obtain child care and shall file an annual report on its evaluation with the Early Childhood Authority and the Legislative Research Commission.

The Governor's Early Childhood Initiative, HB 706, was enacted during the 2000 Session of the General Assembly. This important initiative combines funding from the CCDF and Kentucky's Phase I Tobacco Settlement dollars. As a result, an increased focus on child care issues means that early care and education will be enhanced through the following:

-
- Eligibility for participation in the Child Care Assistance Program may be increased, to the extent that funds are available, from 165% to 170% of the federal poverty level during the effective period of the FFY 2002 and 2003 CCDF Plan.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide childcare subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

KY is currently able to serve all eligible families who seek child care assistance that meet income guidelines. At this time we have no waiting lists.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

KY is working through the Early Childhood Authority, the Early Childhood Councils, and the Early Childhood Business Councils to achieve this goal. In addition some Resource and Referral agencies and Service Agents have accessed additional local resources to supplement child care assistance.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

KY's co-payment schedule meets this guideline. Sliding scale from 0-10%.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

KY is able to assist teen parents who are pursuing a high school diploma or GED. We are also able to assist adults pursuing a GED, vocational training, or post-secondary education that will lead to self-sufficiency.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of childcare.

KY exempts one time payments such as tax refunds, lottery winnings, educational loans or grants, and payments made specifically for the child such as Kinship Care payments, child eligible SSI or Disability, etc.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for childcare assistance.

KY does not utilize asset testing for child care assistance eligibility.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

KY does not do this. Current budget shortfalls for the state will probably not allow us to consider this at any time in the near future.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

KY is accomplishing this goal through Early Childhood Councils, R & R's, Service Agents. Multiple sources include distribution of pamphlets in local offices, newspaper articles, video tapes that are played in the Community Based Services offices, some radio spots and interviews.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

This is an on-going effort. Workgroups are currently working on translation of forms, revising them to be more user-friendly.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

KY attempts to promote child care assistance as a benefit/support to the parent rather than a subsidy/entitlement. Confidentiality is mandated and regulations require that policies for the general public must also apply to families receiving the child care assistance.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

This information is distributed through the R & R's, Service Agents, Family Resource centers, Health Departments, and Healthy Start in Child Care staff.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

The Child Care Councils are working collaboratively to achieve this goal. R & R's in some areas are also working with provider organizations and community partners. Division of Child Care staff participate in collaborative efforts with Head Start, Health Departments, Division of Licensed Child Care, the Councils, and other child advocacy partners.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Service Agents, R & R's, and the Councils are working toward this goal under the oversight and guidance of the Division of Child Care and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

This is an on-going process. Division of Child Care consults with the Service Agents to work on ways to get parent feedback and incorporate recommendations.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

While most contact is face-to-face, there is no mandate that it is required. KY is piloting a program that allows redeterminations by mail or fax in the county with the largest CCAP population. KY does not have the technology to allow for internet filing at this point.

We do have concerns that allowing filing without face-to-face contact does not allow counselors to develop an important relationship with the families and to perhaps identify other needs. KY's Comprehensive Family Services focus encourages staff to treat families in a holistic way, rather than just do eligibility determinations.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Families that are referred by Community Based Services workers do not have to re-verify information that is provided on the referral form. If completed correctly, families do not usually have to provide any additional documentation. Once critical information is documented and on file, it is not required to verify again.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Several counties, primarily in the larger urban areas, offer multiple sites and outreach offices at this time. Counselors in other counties attempt to accommodate families when time and staffing permit. Some go to schools or places of employment when possible.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Some offices are attempting to flex staff time in order to offer more hours. However, numbers of staff available, time constraints, and budget constraints have not permitted us to staff offices or phones during evenings and weekends. All of the Service Agents have toll-free lines, at least in their central offices, and can have counselors return calls to families. Service agents do have counselors that cover all 120 counties but there are not full time counselors in every county. There are, however, local phone numbers for families to call or to leave a message for the counselor.
Accessibility issues are an on-going effort.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

Although regulations allow for 30 days to notify parents of their eligibility, most parents are advised of their eligibility on the date of application. Eligibility is normally immediate unless there is a different date specified if the family has a referral from Community Based Services.
Occasionally, counselors will need verification of income, immunization, or some other record to make a final determination. Most families in these situations are presumed eligible and allowed time to submit the necessary documentation.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

While most contact is face-to-face, there is no mandate that it is required. KY is piloting a program that allows redeterminations by mail or fax in the county with the largest CCAP population.

We do have concerns that allowing filing without face-to-face contact does not allow counselors to develop an important relationship with the families and to perhaps identify other needs. KY's Comprehensive Family Services focus encourages staff to treat families in a holistic way, rather than just do eligibility determinations.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

Current regulation limits families to 3 provider changes per year although a counselor may approve additional changes if appropriate. Counselors are also to advise families of this limit when application is made and to counsel them regarding the importance of stability for their children in an attempt to reduce frequent changes.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

This is KY's policy.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Current policy allows a 30-day break in employment if the child care slot would be lost. Consideration of expansion of the time limit can be made for job searches that extend beyond the current 30-day limit.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

If funding forces changes in eligibility categories, families are transferred to that category automatically. An exception to this would be the elimination of a funding source and there were no other categories in which the family could qualify.

If family circumstances change causing the family to no longer be eligible in a particular category, re-application is required but can be facilitated and may not require a face-to-face contact.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

We are beginning to explore this area.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Kentucky is currently meeting this goal. In programs with multiple funding sources in which eligibility has expired or terminated in one program, the families that are still eligible have their eligibility switched through a batch process that does not require anything of the family. They are unaware of the change.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

This is the goal of the Governor's Early Childhood Initiative.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

KY has identified the need and is considering ways to minimize the gaps and barriers, including training possibilities.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

In most areas, eligibility determination is completed on the day of application and generally there is no more than a 1week wait for an appointment.

In areas where caseloads are a concern and impact customer service, KY is working with the agencies to find ways to reduce the caseloads and improve customer service.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

One Service Agent does a quarterly survey. A phone survey has been conducted as a part of the yearly monitoring of the Service Agent contract.

Improvement in this area is an on-going process.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

KY supports local R & R's through their state association, KACCRRA. There are continuing efforts to improve services, to improve and increase training possibilities, and to bring all R & R's to technological efficiency.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

KY does this.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

KY has implemented a voluntary rating system which provides technical assistance, financial incentives, and recognition to improve the quality of care provided to KY's families. Parental involvement is a component of the requirements of this system. There are differentials for providers providing care during non-traditional hours, for providers that are accredited, and for children requiring special care. Differentials are allowed to be cumulative.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Parents are required to pay any difference between the state maximum rate and the provider's rate to the public, less the parental co-pay, unless waived by the provider. KY does not mandate that providers cannot charge CCAP families for any difference between their rate to the public and the state maximum rate.

We recognize that since our maximum rates are based on the 75th percentile of the market rates, that there will be care available for more than we reimburse. We do not feel that we can force the provider to accept a financial loss or to pass the loss along to private pay parents in order to meet this goal.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

This has not been a state-wide effort although some area agencies make this effort. This is seen as an effort that will be addressed through the Early Childhood Business Councils.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

This has not been a state-wide effort although some area agencies make this effort. This is seen as an effort that will be addressed through the Early Childhood Business Councils.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

This has not been a state-wide effort although some area agencies make this effort. This is seen as an effort that will be addressed through the Early Childhood Business Councils.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

This has not been a state-wide effort although some area agencies make this effort. This is seen as an effort that will be addressed through the Early Childhood Business Councils.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in childcare.

KY does not currently do this and budget shortfalls are not encouraging for development in the near future.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

KY does not currently do this and budget shortfalls are not encouraging for development in the near future.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private childcare assistance program.

The Early Childhood Business Councils will explore this.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

Currently KY uses 20% of the federal amount and no change is anticipated.

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

KY does not do this and no change is anticipated.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state childcare tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

This is legislative action that may be considered in the next session, perhaps updated to 35% (e.g. $288-$420).

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

This may be another area that the Early Childhood Business Council can address.

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

On KY's forms these are clearly identified.

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for childcare.

This may be another area that the Early Childhood Business Council can address.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across childcare and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

This is another area addressed in the Governor's Early Childhood Initiative.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

KY currently does this through the Child Care Information Center, part of ACF and is open to other collaborative efforts.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Executive management has been meeting with State Legislators and the Governor providing them with information that supports the need for additional resources specifically devoted to child care services and quality. Particularly when it comes to increasing state funds for child care services. Elected officials are beginning to embrace the need for additional services and have approved the establishment a statewide Pre-K initiative.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

N/A

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

N/A

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

N/A

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Regarding the mobilization of resources will reflect the establishment of our Wrap Around Child Care Program in partnership with certain Head Start programs to provide full day/full year services for needy families.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

N/A

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Presently allow students to obtain child care. However, must be in some activity for at least 20 hours per week.

Program allows students to receive child care assistance as long as the students are attending an educational program for a minimum average of 20 hours per week or engaged in some combination of employment/job/training/school for a combined average of at least 20 hours per week. Policy effective 1993.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Program considers gross earnings from all sources of employment, and the profit from self employment and unearned incomes types. The program does not consider other types of resources when determining eligibility. Policy effective 1993.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

We do not do asset testing.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

N/A

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Currently providing this service.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Making efforts to provide outreach initiatives that are sensitive to the needs of families.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

Working with all parties to ensure that we do not present information in a manner that maybe received as demeaning.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

Are providing this assistance via out R/Rs.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Contracted Resource and Referral agencies provide this service for us. The three contracted R/Rs are Agenda for Children which covers the Orleans and Thibodaux Regions, Partnership in Child Care, Baton Rouge and Acadian regions and, NSU Child and Family Network, Alexandria, Shreveport and Monroe Regions. We have contracted with these agencies since 1993 as part of our quality component under CCDF.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Already doing this. Provide brochures and applications to Resource and Referral agencies, child care providers, Housing Authority agencies, Head Start centers and any other entities that wish to have this information available to give to interested individuals. We only provide information not training of outside sources. Brochures and applications have been distributed to other entities since 1996.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

This issue is being addressed for revision effective some time in 2002.
The application for child care assistance was revised 1/01 to make it user friendly. The application is three pages front/back.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Allow filing by mail is currently occurring.
Participants may hand deliver or mail applications to the parish office where they (participants) reside. Participants are allowed to fax application, but the application is not processed to completion until the application with "authentic" is received by the local office. Procedure in place since 1993. we will soon process faxed and mailed applications the same.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Working toward making this change in 2002.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

This is currently occurring. Applications are provided at 70 parish offices. Some parishes have more than one office.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

N/A

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

Recently implemented policy to address this issue.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

This was never a requirement.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

N/A

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Currently reconsidering changing back to 12 month redetermination period.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

This issue is currently under discussion for possible implementation.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

N/A

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

N/A

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

N/A

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

With the establishment of the statewide Pre-K initiative, various entities: Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Catholic Diocese of New Orleans, and various public school systems have been working collaboratively to ensure that this program is successful. Initiated in Summer of 2000 with actual Bill approved in Spring 2001 and the program implemented January 2002.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

We feel that the present as well as past eligibility staff provide professional services to those that seek assistance. Sensitivity training was provided in certain areas of the state in 2001. We are now discussing the possibility of offering Diversity Training to staff.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Child care eligibility processing is now located in all 64 parishes. The rollout of child care eligibility to all parishes in 1999 and concluded in 2000.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

In 2001 contracted with Southern University to conduct a Child Care Survey, which was completed also in 2001. This survey provided us with information regarding participants satisfaction with the Child Care Assistance Program as well as how they feel about the state of child care in Louisiana.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

Since 1993 have contracted and provided whatever resources that we had availability to the three Resource and Referral agencies mentioned at 3.5 of this survey. We have had a good working relationship with the R/R agencies.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

Will implement rate increase in Fall 2002. We conducted a market rate survey in May 2001 and rates covering the 75th percentile of the various providers surveyed.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

Periodically re-evaluate reimbursement policy to ensure providers participation and the needs of families.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Policy in place that addresses this issue. The child care provider agreement states that the provider must not charge any more or less than the amount shown on the certificate in order to become or remain an eligible Child Care Assistance Program provider. Provider must charge parent/guardian the difference between the total charged and the Agency payment.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

N/A

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

N/A

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

N/A

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

N/A

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

N/A

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

N/A

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

N/A

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

N/A

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

N/A

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

N/A

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

With the implementation of the Wrap Around Child Care Program in 2000 we have tried to coordinate eligibility requirements with Head Start and in 2001 with Pre-K. programs.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

N/A

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

The Governor and General Assembly have approved increasing the eligibility level from the current 45% to 50% in January 2002. Maryland has the highest state median income in the country, therefore our 50% level in real dollars is near, or equal to, some states' 85% level.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

Maryland's Child Care Business Partnership sponsored a series of breakfast meetings for business and local government to meet with one another, State officials and the child care community and develop strategies to address common needs. So far three initiatives have been funded as a result, with CCDF monies and a 25% match from the business sector and local government. They have included the construction of an on-site child care center in an industrial park, supported by multiple employers, on land donated by the County; an employer sponsored financial subsidy program for low-income employees in a large metropolitan hospital, and; a resource and referral service targeted to parents of children with special needs, that brings information and training into the parents' worksite.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

Maryland's Congressional delegation have been briefed on the need for additional child care funds and are very supportive.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

Maryland serves all eligible families who seek assistance. Presently, Maryland does not have a waiting list.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Maryland has a NGA Team that is Building Political Will for Early Care and Education Programs. We intend to have a Public Relations campaign that is ongoing.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Maryland has capped co-payments, even as we have raised rates that we pay providers in order to meet this goal which is also one of this Department's MFR goals that is reported to the legislature. In FY 2002 our goal is that 74% of families receiving a child care subsidy have co-payments at 10% or less of gross family income.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Students who are involved in certain programs at one of Maryland's community colleges and have an approved employability plan may receive a subsidy; teen parents who are completing high school have an additional income disregard for eligibility, although entire family income is considered.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

In addition to the existing income exemptions, Effective 1/1/02 Maryland will increase income disregards for teen parents and relative caretakers from $2,200 up to $5,000 per child.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Already in place.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Maryland began adjusting the eligibility ceiling to reflect changes in SMI this year.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

The Department's Public Relations Office developed and disseminated new brochure on child care subsidies this year, accompanied by a poster campaign and mailing to former TANF recipients.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Brochure was also printed in Spanish.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

The campaign was entitled "Help for Hard Working Families".

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

Maryland publishes a booklet on how to Chose Child Care which child care providers are required by regulation to give to all parents of children in care. We also fund a network of 13 regional resource and referral centers.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Maryland has involved all stakeholders in a 5 Year strategic planning process.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Have conducted specific training for organizations serving non-English speaking families.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Applications for the child care assistance program has already been simplified.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Filing may be done by mail and will be on line with the implementation of our new computer system in 2003.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Current documentation on income and child support is already accessible if that applicant is receiving other assistance from the department of social services.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Maryland provides applications at multiple sites across the state, i.e. 40+ local department of social services locations.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

All local departments of social services have evening hours at least one day a week.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

72

N/A

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

This is already possible.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

This is handled by local staff on an as needed basis.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

This is already our policy.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Child care is available during job search and continuity of service is available.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

This is our policy. There is no break in service.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

Current policy allows continuation of child care subsidy in Head Start programs until the end of the school year even if the family would otherwise be ineligible, on a case-by-case basis. CCDF funds are used to provide wrap-around services, to make full-day and full-year programs available at some Head Start and other sites.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Funding is already pooled to assure continuity of service.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

Maryland has a Headstart/Child Care/EEEP Steering Committee that enables to us to plan and work collaboratively. It has both state and local representatives.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Staff has had Customer Service training to improve the quality of interaction and sensitivity. The Department is beginning to implement various strategies for assisting customers with Limited English Proficiency.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Eligibility determination must be completed within 30 days.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

Maryland is in the process of developing a customer satisfaction assessment program.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

The Department fully funds 13 Regional Resource and Referral Centers and a Statewide Coordinating Entity that oversees and supports the centers and maintains the LOCATE database. Contract is $5.2 million annually.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

Maryland fully complies with this policy.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

Maryland also offers tiered reimbursement for Providers who are participating in our credential and accreditation programs.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

N/A

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

The Maryland Child Care Business Partnership is a vehicle by which this occurs.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

The Maryland NGA Team on Building Public and Political Will for Early Care and Education is pursuing this strategy.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

See 1.2.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

Again, the Maryland Child Care Business Partnership has encouraged this.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

CCDF funds were used to match private business and local government contributions to expand the availability of care especially for low-wage employees.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

See 8.5.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

N/A

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

Maryland has an Earned Income Tax Credit for low income families which we publicize to child care providers and families who use child care services.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

Maryland will propose legislation for 2002 to increase the child care tax credit expense limits.

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

Maryland has a Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Care Financing, which was established by legislation and appointed by the Governor that is examining various strategies including dedicated taxes or funding streams.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Our Department worked closely with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) as we develop new programs and services. Recently MSDE established a dozen new "Judy Centers" to serve the needs of preschool age children and their families in low-income areas. Our Department assisted with the guidelines for operation and selection and oversight of the programs.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

N/A

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

The Governor has created an Interagency Coordinating Council to address early childhood issues, including education efforts by members and their respective agencies. This Council has addressed these issues and presented a report to the legislature for information purposes with recommendations for actions.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

OCY has established and continues to seek out partners in our efforts to access all available funds for child care, including drawing down 100% of MS's Federal Matching allotment.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

N/A

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

The MDHS/OCY has requested additional state funds to enable us to access all matching federal funds, which would provide services to many families now on the waiting list. To date, OCY has not received sufficient state funding to access 100% of our CCDF federal matching allocation.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

OCY has established partnerships with a municipality and a private business to access additional federal matching funds. We are in the process of establishing a designated entity to receive donated funds which will enable us to access even more of the funds which are available to Mississippi.

OCY has established and continues to seek out partners in our efforts to access all available funds for child care. An example would be OCY'S partnership with Head Start for extended day child care services in an effort to meet the needs of working parents.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Currently there are no established co-payment fees which exceed 10% of gross family income.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Full-time child care is provided for full-time students who are income-eligible.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

This is currently being implemented, such as, SSI benefits, TANF money payments, grants or student loans, and non-court-ordered child support.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Asset testing is not required. Only gross income is considered.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

N/A

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

This is currently being accomplished through promotional radio spots, media conferences, and public workshops. The child care licensure mailing list is utilized to send information through the mail as well as routine mailings to all providers who participate in the Child Care Certificate Program. OCY also sponsors a toll-free Resource and Referral Child Care statewide hotline.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Programmatic literature and early childhood consumer education has been developed at low-literacy levels to ensure that it can be easily understood.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

The child care certificate program and early childhood educational information is made available through nine Designated Agents across the state. These nine Designated Agents administer comprehensive community economic development programs in addition to child care. The Child Care Certificate Program is the only government-subsidized assistance program they administer.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

Consumer information on early childhood development and quality child care is provided to assist parents in evaluating quality, licensed child care centers and family child care homes.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Currently outreach activities are being implemented statewide through partnership subgrants, public forums, and media activities.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Applications and technical assistance is provided by the state lead agency through the Resource and Referral hotline, the nine OCY Designated Agents, and through county MDHS offices.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

The application process has been simplified to include only information required for determining eligibility for the program and to meet state and federal reporting requirements.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Applications may be submitted by mail. However, OCY does not have a statewide, automated child care system in place which would allow applications to be submitted by email or phone.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

The OCY requires nine Designated Agents to use information already on file for families when applying or reapplying for child care services.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

81

The OCY Designated Agents make applications available at multiple sites within their service areas for easy access across the state.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Based upon volume and specific program schedules, hours are extended for eligibility determination as needed. This is specifically noted during the roll-over process.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

Immediate eligibility is not provided but retroactive certificates are written based upon client's service eligibility date.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

This has been accomplished.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

N/A

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Currently there is a six-month redetermination period.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Currently child care is not provided for job search.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

This is currently OCY policy. Cases are only closed if families become ineligible, such as, child ages out, parent no longer working, or income exceeds 85th percent of the State Median Income.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

This is currently being accomplished with Head Start and we are exploring the possibility of coordinating services with Pre-K and Title 1.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Certificates are written for a twelve-month period irrespective of funding sources.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

This is currently being done. The Office for Children and Youth is working to keep eligibility requirements consistent with Head Start, USDA Foods, and TANF Child Care Programs. Also, OCY has developed a Child Care System to avoid a break-in-service for those children and families moving from one eligibility category to another.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

This is currently being done to the extent which limited funding will allow.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

This is currently being done to the extent which limited funding will allow.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

N/A

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

These services are offered by the state lead agency.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

83

This is the current policy.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

This is accomplished on a routine basis.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

N/A

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

This is currently being done to the extent which limited funding will allow.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

N/A

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

This is being done on a limited basis.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

N/A

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

This is currently being accomplished.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

N/A

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

This is currently being accomplished.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

N/A

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

N/A

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

N/A

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

N/A

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

This is currently being accomplished.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Ongoing state process. DFS requests, and will continue to request, increases in each year's state budget. In 1997, DFS was a major sponsor of two conferences, one for policy makers and one for practitioners, on quality care and its impact on brain development.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

N/A

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

N/A

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

Ongoing state process. DFS requests, and will continue to request, increases in each year's state budget. State funding has increased from $20,079,782 in our 1995 appropriation to $79,161,698 in our 2002 appropriation. Our 2001 appropriation, in addition to state general revenue, beginning in 1998 includes gaming funds, and beginning in 2002 includes funds from the state tobacco settlement.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

DFS works closely with the state Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Caring Communities, local foundations, the United Way, other state and federal agencies and a variety of other partners to build capacity to serve Missouri families.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Our state sliding fee scale average co-pay is approximately 10% of gross family income depending upon family size.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Missouri provides child care assistance to students.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Missouri deducts the amount of any medical insurance premiums from gross income.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Missouri has never used asset testing.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

N/A

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Missouri provides information on child care subsidies through multiple sources and venues including the state Child Care Resource and Referral Network, DFS offices which are located in all 115 counties in the state, Caring Communities partnerships, Head Start Collaboration, Community Action Agencies, and numerous interagency collaborative efforts at both state and local levels.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

We provide forms and information in English and Spanish. We provide supplies of application forms to child care centers or local agencies that work with families and that wish to assist families in the application process. We utilize a toll-free translation hotline and have formed partnerships in several counties to utilize resources, such as foreign language parent educators in our Parents as Teachers and Early Head Start Programs, to assist in certain situations.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

In Missouri, eligibility for child care is not dependent upon receipt or application for TANF, Food Stamps, or any other "welfare" type program.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

DFS provided funding to the state Child Care Resource and Referral Network for a 3-year consumer education campaign which utilized a variety of media to disperse information on the importance of quality child care such as brochures, posters, public service announcements, and billboards. DFS also partnered with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to base R&R staff on-site in our metro St. Louis and Kansas City DFS offices to assist TANF, Food Stamp, and Medicaid families in identifying and locating quality child care options. DFS is also involved in other collaborative efforts at the state and local levels such as Caring Communities to provide information to parents. Literature and information is available at all 115 DFS county offices.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Missouri coordinates activities and strategies via our Early Childhood Interagency Team (ECIT), which consists of staff from the Missouri Departments of Social Services, Health, Mental Health, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Head Start. In addition to this ECIT team, DFS works closely with local foundations, coalitions, other state and local organizations, and various advocacy groups to coordinate outreach activities both at state and local levels.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

See 3.5. Missouri works with the state Child Care Resource and Referral Network to provide information to the general public. DFS encourages staff in their local county offices to work with community organizations, faith organizations, other state and local agencies, and providers in their communities to facilitate the application process by providing supplies of application forms and technical assistance to interested parties. In most counties, the DFS County Director, or his/her representative sits on numerous local boards, committees, and coalitions exchanging information and participating in a variety of local outreach efforts. DFS Central Office staff presents information at various conferences, workshops, and seminars for numerous organizations and agencies across the state.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Missouri's child care application is a one page form. Eligibility is based solely on income and need for care.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Missouri allows filing by mail or fax.

Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Missouri uses documents already on file and requests documentation of only those factors necessary to determine eligibility.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Although applications are actually processed at each of the 115 local DFS county offices, the local offices provide supplies of application forms to interested organizations and providers, such as local health departments, child care centers, resource and referral agencies, and non-profit organizations to facilitate the process.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Approximately 24 of our 115 county offices offer extended day services. Some offer services either before 8:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m., or both, either by appointment or by extending office hours of operation.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

N/A

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

Missouri does not require a face-to-face interview.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

DFS provides on-site child care resource and referral (R&R) in our metropolitan DFS offices in St. Louis and Kansas City to assist families in making appropriate choices and refers families to their local R&R in other areas.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Missouri has a 12-month redetermination period. However, families are required to report changes and if changes are reported during this time period, caseworkers adjust cases accordingly.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Missouri currently allows 30 days.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

Missouri has always had a seamless system. Eligibility is based solely on income and need with funding sources invisible to the family.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

N/A

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

N/A

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

Missouri coordinates early childhood activities at the state level via an Early Childhood Interagency Team. (See 3.5)

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

In 2001, DFS provided training in "Customer Service" to all eligibility staff. This is in addition to the 3 week basic orientation that eligibility staff is required to attend when hired. DFS offers additional training opportunities, including conference participation, as needed and as appropriate.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

DFS is working on a caseload standards project.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

DFS provides mail-in consumer comment cards at all 115 DFS County Offices.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

DFS provides funding from CCDF to support the state Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

While DFS has implemented a variety of rate incentives in the past two years moving certain providers closer to the 75th percentile, funding to increase rates is dependent upon legislative appropriation.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

In 2001, Missouri implemented a new automated system which allows for daily payrolls, as opposed to the old system which limited payments to one of 3 specified payrolls per month, allowing for more timely efficient payment to providers. This new system also allows providers to choose the direct deposit option that cuts down on the time it takes to receive payment.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Missouri currently has this policy in effect only for children receiving child care under our Child Welfare Protective Services system.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

N/A

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

N/A

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

Missouri provided funding to our state Community Action Agencies to encourage the use of EITC that included outreach to employers in their service delivery areas. Our state Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies use the NCICC (National Child Care Information Center) Employer Toolkit to provide information to employers in their service delivery areas.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

N/A

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

N/A

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

N/A

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

N/A

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

N/A

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

N/A

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

N/A

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Missouri coordinates early childhood efforts via our Early Childhood Interagency Team that meets on a regular basis (see 3.5).

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

Missouri is working on common data elements within the state through the Show Me Results and Missouri Results Initiative.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Materials were prepared and presented to NC lawmakers during the 2000 and 2001 sessions on the importance of funding for child care subsidies. This was critical in securing legislative approval to transfer a large amount of TANF funding into the Child Care and Development Block Grant ($76 million in SFY 01-02).
In addition, the NC General Assembly approved a new pre-kindergarten initiative to be piloted in 2001 for at-risk four-year-olds. A goal of the pilot will be to reach at-risk children who are not currently receiving early childhood education, including subsidized child care.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

Local Smart Start partnerships and other local groups have worked to involve the business community in creating funding sources for child care.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

NA

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

NC increased Smart Start funding in SFY 00-01, which provided more state funds for child care subsidies. However, Smart Start funds were reduced for SFY 01-02 due to a State budget crisis. Smart Start expenditures for child care subsidies are used to leverage both TANF and CCDF funds.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) published a manual, *Financing Early Childhood Education*, which was distributed to local Smart Start partnerships to provide information about options for financing child care when state and federal funds are not sufficient.

96

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

(Already doing)

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

(Already doing)

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

NC changed its fee policy in 2001 to remove any limit on the length of time that families may receive child care subsidies without regard to income (and without paying any fees) to support Child Protective Services or Child Welfare Services.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

(We do not do asset testing)

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Effective October 1, 2001, NC increased the income eligibility limits for the subsidized child care program. This is done every two years to correspond to 75% of State Median Income, according to family size.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

The NC Division of Child Development has added information on how to get help paying for child care to its website. Child care resource and referral agencies and Smart Start partnerships also provide this information at the local level.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Given the large increase in the state's Hispanic population, NC is starting the process of translating forms and information regarding the subsidy program into Spanish.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

The Division of Child Development has a very thorough web site that provides a great deal of information to parents in a sensitive and respectful manner.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

The NC Division of Child Development launched a new addition to its website, www.ncchildcare.net, early in 2000 that allows parents to access more detailed information on all child care programs statewide.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

The Division of Child Development recently created a flyer for county departments of social services agencies to send to child care providers regarding the increase in income eligibility guidelines so that parents can be informed.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Presentations have been made to provider organizations and other agencies and groups on the subsidized child care program, including the eligibility criteria and how families can apply.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

In 2001, the Child Care Subsidy Manual and forms (including application) became available to counties on-line. Forms will eventually become interactive on-line.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

(Already allow applications to be submitted by mail.)

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

NC began working on a department project in 2000 that will eventually allow a case management system to share eligibility information across assistance programs, making it easier for families to apply for various types of assistance at the local level.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

In some areas, parents can apply at the child care site and at multiple sites operated by the local department of social services or the local Smart Start partnership.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Some county departments of social services offer extended hours. The Division of Child Development encourages this, but it is a local decision.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

As of October 2001, counties are required to purge their child care subsidy waiting lists at least every six months, so that information on families seeking assistance will be current when funds become available for services.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

(Already doing)

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

(Already doing.)

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

(Already doing)

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

(Already doing). This statement applies in some cases, but not all in North Carolina. The 12 weeks could apply to a Work First (North Carolina's TANF program) family, but non-Work First families would be limited to 8 weeks.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

(Already doing – Funds are blended at the state level so that it is invisible to county agencies and parents.)

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

Smart Start collaborates with Head Start and 4-year-old programs in the public schools to maximize services. Federal CCDF funds are used to pay for wraparound child care in Head Start programs.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

This is not an issue, as multiple funds are blended and seamless.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

(Already doing)

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

N/A – local agency administration.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

N/A – local agency administration.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

N/A -- local agency administration. Some counties conduct periodic satisfaction surveys, but it is not done statewide.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

NC expanded funds for child care resource and referral agencies in 2000 and 2001.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

A new market rate study was completed in NC in 2000. Results showed that in many cases, providers were charging rates below the market rates currently in effect.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

A Market Rate Advisory Committee that included providers, advocates, and local purchasing agencies met in 2000-01 to make recommendations for payment policies.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

NA

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

NA

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

NA

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

NA

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

NA

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

NA

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

NA

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

NA

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

NA

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

NA

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

NA

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

NA

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

A state earned income tax credit was proposed in the 2001 legislative session, but has not passed as of this date.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

NA

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

NA

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

State policymakers attended two strategy sessions conducted by the Southern Institute on Children and Families on April 10 and 11, 2000 in Oklahoma City to review strengths and areas needing improvement in the Oklahoma child care subsidy system.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

Business leaders were made aware of subsidy issues during the Southern Institute's strategy session and as members of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

TANF funds were utilized to extend eligibility for the subsidy program to up to 82% of the state median income.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

While state funding has not increased, the state is currently serving all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Oklahoma is utilizing TANF-direct and TANF-transfer funds to support child care assistance.

Oklahoma is modeling the effectiveness of public-private partnerships through a network of thirteen communities that are linked through Oklahoma Success By 6®. Each of the thirteen pilot communities are working to establish local public-private partnerships. With staff support provided by Oklahoma Success By 6®, many partners, both from state agencies and the private sector, are providing technical assistance and training to the mobilizing communities.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Families with one child in care pay a maximum co-payment of 9.8%; however, a family with 4 children in care could pay a family co-payment of up to 16%. A committee is meeting to review ways to reduce co-payments for larger families.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Child Care assistance has always been available for students for two to four years of college.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

There are 20 different sources of income that are exempt from income calculations.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Oklahoma does not do asset testing as a criteria for assistance.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

N/A

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

The application for child care assistance was added to information on child care services on the DHS website.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

N/A

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

A new outreach campaign will describe the child care assistance program as tuition scholarships.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

County assistance and licensing staff provide parents with a brochure and a video on choosing child care; the agency web page includes a Child Care Locator that lists all child care facilities by type and services provided; there is a statewide network of resources and referral agencies that assist parents; and there's a public awareness campaign to encourage good child care choices.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

A new application packet was distributed for display at a variety of locations, i.e., child care settings, libraries, business.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Providers receive training when signing an agreement to accept subsidy children; success By Six community organizations are provided with information on the child care assistance program; and a workshop on child care service was provided at two faith-based conferences.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Oklahoma simplified their application several years ago into two pages for families only applying for child care assistance.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Applications are accepted by mail or phone.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

The only documentation required is proof of income and employment or education schedule.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

A new application packet was distributed for display at a variety of locations, i.e., child care settings, libraries, businesses.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

A recent agency initiative on customer service requires county offices to evaluate their hours of operation and ensure that all families have access to services.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

If necessary for maintaining employment or starting a new job, child care can be approved for 30 days without required income or need verification. A new policy is being piloted in six counties in which complete applications for child care assistance will be approved within two days of submission.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

A face to face interview is not required for initial application or redetermination.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

N/A

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

There is a 12 month redetermination period.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Effective January 2002, families receiving child care assistance who complete their education or training or lose their employment can continue to receive assistance for up to 30 days while seeking employment.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

Oklahoma has always had a seamless system where eligible parents can move from one funding source to another without reapplying or a break in eligibility.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

N/A

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Oklahoma has always had a seamless system where eligible parents can move from one funding source to another without reapplying or a beak in eligibility.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

One agency administers all the federal child care funds but they also collaborate with Head Start, the state pre-kindergarten program and the state health care agencies.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Eligibility staff are trained through satellite broadcasts and receive frequent updates and technical assistance.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

See 4.6.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

On-going surveys of random samples of clients ask questions regarding customer service and unmet child care needs. Input from child care providers is obtained through surveys and on-going hearing around the state.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

A state level coordinator has been added to provide technical assistance to the nine regional resources and referral agencies.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

New child care rates became effective October 1, 2001 that bring rates in higher quality facilities to the 75th percentile across the state. Increases were based on recent findings from a market rate survey at a cost of $5.7 million for the remainder of the fiscal year.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

An electronic benefit transfer system is being piloted that will reimburse providers more quickly than under the current system and provide up-to-date information on a family eligibility statues.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Providers have always been prohibited from charging above the established payments.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

N/A

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

N/A

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

N/A

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

N/A

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

N/A

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

N/A

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

N/A

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

N/A

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

N/A

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

N/A

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

N/A

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

N/A

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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112

Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

Current Initiatives:

- DHHS educates federal and state policy makers on the need for action through collaboration with:
    - First Steps
    - Advisory Committee on Regulation of Child Day Care Facilities
    - Alliance for South Carolina's Children– child care was one of Alliance's legislative initiatives
- DHEC created and sustains the HCCSC Steering Committee which has as one of its' primary functions the education of state and federal policymakers on the need for action through collaboration with partners, such as:
    - The Alliance for SC's Children
    - South Carolina Christian Action Council
    - South Carolina Child Care Association
    - Success By Six
    - Institute on Family & Neighborhood Life
    - South Carolina Association of Christian Schools & Childcare Network
    - State agencies – DHHS, DSS, DMH, SC Kids Count – Budget & Control Board, First Steps
    - Child Care Resource and Referral
    - Governor's Office
    - The "Who Cares?" booklet was distributed to each legislator during the 2001 legislative session. The Steering Committee supported selected bills introduced in the 2001 legislative session and is in the process, in collaboration with our partners, of identifying and setting priorities for the 2002 legislative session.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

Current Initiatives:

- Success By 6 of the Midlands Family Friendly Workplace Committee and annual Conference has focused on involving the business community in addressing workforce needs such as child care.
- Governor has created the Family Friendly Workplace Award, to be given to businesses for the first time in 2002.
- Many of the local Success By 6 initiatives conduct community child watch events that educate the community and the business leaders on the importance of the early years in a child's life and the need for quality child care/early education.

Proposed Initiative:

- DHHS is exploring options with the South Carolina United Way to educate/involve the business community

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

Comment: This would require a dramatic increase in federal appropriations. A 12/6/00 news release by the U. S. Department of Health and Human for fiscal year 1999 reported that "1.8 million children in low-income families are receiving federal child care subsidies on an average monthly basis…Yet, with 15 million children estimated to be eligible for federal support, only 12 percent of those children are receiving federal help due to limited federal funds."

Current Initiative: United Way of South Carolina and the Success By 6 Statewide Initiative is planning a workshop on the need for increased federal funding for child care at the Success By 6 Statewide Conference in October 2001. This will provide an opportunity to educate local United Ways and Success By 6 initiatives as well as other child advocates in the state.

Status: A small increase in federal funding for the CCDF is anticipated this year. However, widespread national efforts would be needed to advocate for the significant increase in federal appropriations that would be necessary to cover child care assistance for up to 85% of states' median income levels.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

Current Initiative: First Steps, through its county partnerships, is providing over 1,000 child care subsidies to the working poor where federal child care subsidies are not available.

Comment: To date, SC has not been able to determine exactly how many families actually need, would be eligible, or would seek child care assistance. However, projections based on the 1990 Census (pending receipt of updates data from the 2000 Census) estimate that hundreds of millions of additional funds could likely be needed to provide child care assistance to potentially eligible and interested families based on the number of children in SC from birth - age 12.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Current Initiatives:

- Coordination with First Steps, through which county-wide needs and resource assessments are conducted and strategic plans developed in every county to address identified needs by maximizing available resources.

- DHHS develops contracts/agreements with DDSN, SDE, DSS, R & R's, SDE's Family Literacy offices, etc. to maximize resources in support of families who need child care assistance.
- DHEC, through linked state databases at the State Budget & Control Board, has identified 80,717 children birth through 4 years and another 98,110 children ages 5 through 12 years, as children with special health care (CSHCN) needs. (See page 5 of "Who Cares?" booklet) The department has validated that parents of CSHCN have difficulty in finding federal, state and community resources to support their child care needs. Presently, the CSHCN Program employs a parent advocate to work with parents and the community to meet the unique needs of this population.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Currently: DHHS' established co-payments do not exceed 10% of the gross family income.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Current Initiatives:

- Students may apply for child care assistance if they are 18 years of age or an emancipated minor and are working, in school or a training program or are disabled.
- DHHS has a contract with the Family Literacy program through the State Department of Education to provide child care for those students who are participating in a Family Literacy program in order to earn their high school diploma or GED.
- At least five First Steps counties are providing child care assistance specifically to teen parents.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

Current Initiative: DHHS has developed a list of income inclusions and exclusions to be used when determining eligibility.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Current Initiative: DHHS does not require asset testing.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Current Initiatives:

- DHHS changed income eligibility levels for entrance into the ABC Child Care Voucher System from 125% to 150% of the federal poverty level in May 2000.
- Federal poverty guidelines are reviewed yearly to annually adjust the income standards and fee scale for child care assistance.

Status: Achieved.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance In Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Current Initiatives:

- Information is currently disseminated through DSS, DHEC, providers, R&R's.
- DHHS attempts to disseminate information in a way that is balanced considering limited resources for child care assistance to unrealistic expectations are not raised.

Proposed Initiatives:

- DHHS is in the process of developing an on-going open enrollment process.
- United Way is looking at ways to approach local employers to develop on site workshops for parents that will include information on how to select and access financial assistance for child care.

Status: Current efforts are sufficient.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Current Initiatives: DHHS has developed/implemented.

- Documents in Spanish.
- Multi-language telephone line.
- Brochures and applications in simple, family-friendly language.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

Currently: Clients can apply for child care assistance through several avenues; i.e., DSS, by telephone, etc.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

Currently:

- DHHS makes the following information available to parents:
    - Child Care check lists
    - Child Care Option Sheet
    - ***Come, Play With Me*** and ***Making All the Difference*** videos relative to quality child care.
    - Parent Handbook
    - Listing of all Enhanced/NAEYC providers
    - Information is also available through First Steps, DSS, and R & R's
- Over 50,000 copies of the pamphlet "A Parent's Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care in South Carolina," have been distributed by R & R's, businesses (i.e., Babies R Us), libraries, real estate office for new families moving into the community, school districts, technical colleges, doctors offices, county health departments, and churches.
- NAEYC's Guidelines for Choosing Child Care Programs can be obtained through the SC Department of Education upon request.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Currently: Applications for child care assistance are available through and with the assistance of:

- Head Start
- R & R's
- State Department of Education (SDE) Family Literacy offices

Proposed Initiative: DHEC through the Newborn Home Visit, Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT), Family Support Services (FSS), Women, Infants and Children's Nutritional (WIC) and CSHCN Programs have access to over 113,474 (July 2001) children in families with incomes that range from 50% to 200% of the federal poverty level. These programs could be an avenue for DHHS strategic outreach activities to this population. (Joyce Brown) Organizations which could assist with this effort include: SC Association for the Education of Young Children, South Carolina Parent Educator's Association, and South Carolina Educators of Children.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Current/On-going: DHHS:
- Provides training to DSS, R & R's, Head Start, and SDE to enable them to assist families in filing applications.
- Provides information about the ABC Child Care Program to the First Steps State Board of Trustees, Office of First Steps county partnerships.
- Presents information about the ABC Child Care Program to state and local early childhood professional organizations and other organizations that are interested in child care issues (such as the Institute in Poverty and Deprivation, etc.).

Proposed Initiative:
- DHEC is willing to be a recipient of DHHS's training on how to assist families in filing applications to obtain child care assistance. (Joyce Brown)
- Meet with Office of First Steps and First Steps county partnerships to share additional information about the ABC Child Care Program, relative to their specific needs.

Status: Achieved.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Currently: DHHS has made every effort to condense and simplify its application for child care assistance.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

Currently: DHHS has allows applications to be files by:
- Mail
- Phone
- DHHS does not have a mechanism to accept applications via Internet.

Proposed Initiative: Explore Internet Filing.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

Current Initiative: There is a seamless eligibility process through the Department of Social Services (DSS) for former welfare recipients who are eligible for transitional child care services after welfare benefits cease (i.e., TCC1 and TCC2).

Proposed Initiative: DHHS is exploring the possibility of utilizing information from Partners for Healthy Children (PHC) applications to determine eligibility for child care.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Current Initiatives: Applications are currently dispersed through:
- ABC Control Center 1-800 number
- SC Department of Social Services
- R & R's
- State Department of Education's Family Literacy offices
- State Department of Education's After-School Programs
- Head Start

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Currently: DHHS currently offers non-conventional hours and toll free lines.
- 1-800 numbers exist for both clients and providers
- Hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday
- Weekend hours are not provided

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

Current Initiative: Seamless Eligibility for DSS Family Independence clients.
Proposed Initiative: Presumptive eligibility for Head Start

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

Current Initiative:
- DHHS does not require face-to-face interviews
- Initial applications and re-determination are transmitted via mail.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

Currently: DHHS does not impede a parent's decision to transfer among providers.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Currently: DHHS has a 12 month eligibility period for all clients.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Current Policy: ABC policy allows only 30 days from the date of unemployment for a parent to find a new job or enroll in school/training program.

Status: DHHS will review current policy; however, we believe that providing 12 weeks of child care assistance to unemployed families may not be the best use of severely limited child care resources (see Comment to Action Step 1.3).

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

Currently:
- Funding sources are invisible to clients
- For children under the age of 13, DHHS has a Continuity of Care (COC) policy for clients remaining eligible at re-determination
- DHHS does not close cases. However, a new application if completed when a family moves from one eligibility category to another because of existing computer system issues.

Status: DHHS will explore further after computer system upgrades are completed.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

Currently: DHHS is not utilizing combined applications for child care assistance.
Proposed Initiative: Linking the applications for child care assistance, Head Start and/or Partners for Healthy Children/Medicaid, Pre-K and Title I.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Status: Achieved.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

Current Initiatives: DHHS coordinates with the following entities to ensure stable and consistent early child care services for children:

- First Steps
- SDE
- DDSN
- Head Start
- Success By 6
- R & R's
- DSS

Proposed Initiative: DHHS is planning additional strategies for collaboration around this issue during 2001-2002.

Status: Achieved.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

Currently:

- A multi-language interpreter line is available for staff to use in instances when a client or provider does not speak English.
- DHHS makes every effort to assure that ABC Control Center staff are professional and well-trained.

Status: Achieved

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Current Policy: Eligibility determination is conducted within 15 days of receipt of the application.
Proposed Initiative: DHHS is exploring additional strategies

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

Comment:

- DHHS conducted an in-house survey about two years ago. Eventually, we would like to implement on a regular basis.

Proposed Initiative:

- The Department of Education will be conducting surveys of school based programs.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

Current Initiative:

- DHHS is currently contracting with the R & R's for these services.
- Some First Steps counties are implementing strategies to enhance the capacity of existing resources and referral services.

Proposed Initiative: DHHS plans to improve services by October 2002.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

Status: Achieved.

- Families receiving child care assistance through the ABC Child Care Program have the option of choosing any type of child care they wish their children to receive.A family's portion of child care fees (co-payment) averages $6 per child per week and remains constant regardless of a child's age, with DHHS paying the balance up to the established maximum rate. This enables low-income families receiving ABC child care assistance to choose the most appropriate care for their children without cost being an overriding factor
- DHHS currently pays registration fees.
- Family co-payment fees are based on income and family size, not on cost of service.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

Currently: To assure accessibility to child care, DHHS bases rates on the 75th percentile of the market rate. Full-time maximum rates for 3-5 and 6-12 year old children in licensed/ registered family day care homes, licensed group day care homes, and licensed child care center are set at the 75th percentile. Rates are then adjusted to provide higher maximum rates for higher quality of care and for infant/toddler care. Effective 10/01/01, under the tiered reimbursement system, rates for ABC Level 2 enhanced providers and ABC Level 3 accredited providers range from the 85th percentile to the 100th percentile of the market rate, with most Level 3 accredited rates being at the 100th percentile.

Status: Achieved

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

Currently:

- The DHHS payment system for ABC Child Care providers offers incentives for higher levels of quality child care, and rates reflect the cost differential for serving infants and toddlers. A family's portion of child care fees ($6 per child per week average) remains constant regardless of a child's age, with DHHS paying the balance up to the established maximum rate. This enables low-income families receiving ABC Child Care assistance to choose the most appropriate care for their children without cost being an overriding factor.
- In response to cash flow pressures on many child care providers, DHHS makes payments to ABC Child Care providers within 10-14 working days of documented services to children receiving ABC assistance. However, the current turn-a-round time is averaging 5-7 business days. Most providers get paid as frequently as twice monthly.
- DHHS currently pays registration fees.
- Fees are based on income and family size, not on cost of service.

Status: Achieved

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Currently: DHHS pays the full cost and registration fees for most providers. DHHS does not want to establish barriers that would prevent clients from going to any provider they choose.

Status: DHHS does not believe this policy would be beneficial to South Carolina families

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

Current Initiatives:

- R&R's have contracts with private businesses
- Success By 6 of the Midlands Family Friendly Workplace Committee and Conference
- It is hoped that the Governor's Family Friendly Award, anticipated to be early 2002, will help educate employers about the benefits associated with family friendly practices such as offering child care assistance to employees.

- First Steps Public Awareness campaign to educate the community, including the employers
- Child Care Workforce Study

Proposed Initiative:

- DHHS is exploring strategies with United Way to facilitate linkages with business communities
- United Way of South Carolina/Success By 6 is exploring funding options to work with selected local United Ways that will educate the business community on the bottom line benefits associated with providing child care assistance to their employees. Employers will also be encouraged to implement strategies to improve the availability, affordability and quality of child care. Such strategies include:
- Establishing a pre-tax dependent care plan that results in savings for both the employer and the employee;
- Providing child care assistance to help offset the cost of child care for employees;
- Purchasing child care spaces in community child care facilities for the children of employees;
- Providing scholarships to local child care facilities to be applied to the cost of care for employees or for eligible families in communities;
- Providing in-kind support to child care facilities such as assistance with accounting procedures, donations of computers, office supplies, toys, play ground equipment, books, paper products, as well as space for staff training or parent meetings.
- Providing incentives to help child care providers receive appropriate training by partnering with state
- government to ensure sufficient scholarships to help providers enroll in TEACH classes at technical colleges;
- Providing incentives to help child care facilities become nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children;
- Promoting early literacy by helping local United Ways to purchase books for distribution at local child care facilities.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

Current Initiative:

- Earned Income Tax Credit information is sent to each client in his/her ABC Child Care Program eligibility packet.

Proposed Initiative:

- DHHS is exploring strategies with United Way to facilitate linkages with business communities.

124

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

Current Initiative:

- Child Care Director Forums are being conducted regularly by the R&R's in the Midlands.
- **The Office of Early Childhood Education hosted the Early Childhood Summer Institute this past summer; about 20% of the participants were childcare teachers.**

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

Currently:

- SC has an established tax law for tax credits for employee child care programs (SC code section 12-6-3440)
- There is also a SC tax credit for child and dependent care expenses (SC code section 12-6-3380).

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed. It has been mentioned that corporate taxes in SC are minimal so tax credits may not offer an appropriate incentive for corporate employers to invest in employee child care programs.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

Currently:

- SC has an established tax law for tax credits for employee child care programs (SC code section 12-6-3440)
- There is also a SC tax credit for child and dependent care expenses (SC code Section 12-6-3380).

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed. It has been mentioned that corporate taxes in SC are minimal so tax credits may not offer an appropriate incentive for corporate employers to invest in employee child care programs.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed. An approach like MoneyPlus program, administered for all state employees through one organization, could be considered.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

Status: It is reported that a **state-level task force** that includes the Department of Revenue **has been formed to consider** how to approach this issue.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a refundable tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a refundable tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit.

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

Status: Additional discussion and research is needed to determine the most beneficial strategies for helping make child care more affordable for families. The benefit of a tax credit would be delayed until after a tax return for the year were filed and the refund received, which may not help some families when they most need it—as they're making child care payments—unless the tax credit were to function as the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Comment:

- DHHS realizes greater coordination is essential and is making efforts through our existing relationships with child care stakeholders. Also, DHHS is working with the Office of First Steps for enhanced coordination of child care strategies by First Steps County Partnerships.
- Participation on the Healthy Child Care South Carolina Steering Committee helps to coordinate initiatives and share information between the public and private sectors.

Status: Efforts to develop additional strategies are ongoing.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

Current/On-going:

- Data is collected according to CCDF requirements for annual and quarterly reporting
- Data is collected as requested by different entities.

Status: Additional discussion is needed to determine whether other southeastern states have not yet implemented data collection by common data elements according to CCDF requirements. DHHS is already reporting data according to the CCDF common data elements. DHHS is unaware of a need for additional data.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

Your State:	Tennessee
Your Name:	Natasha K. Metcalf
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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

(1) During State's 2001 legislative session, developed and disseminated information to key legislators on the needs and cost of child care assistance at these eligibility levels.
(2) In July 2001, co-hosted with the Institute in the state follow-up meeting on the Southern Regional Task Force on Child Care Action Plan.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

(1) Business leaders included in Institute and State's July 2001 Action Plan meeting.
(2) As designed by the Department and other partners, the Corporate-Community Partnership program was established by the legislature in Spring 2000 to develop child care resources and improve child care quality.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

NA

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

Available state funds were shifted within the Department to fund 400 additional child care spaces for low-income eligible families.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Tennessee transfers maximum allowable TANF funds for child care, fully matches CCDF, and allocates a portion of SSBG for child care.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

We are currently revising our entire co-pay structure to more equitably determine co-pay levels. Implementation is targeted for 7/01/02.

129

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Full-time students and those with combinations of work and education have been eligible for child care assistance in Tennessee.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

NA (Income exemptions currently include food stamp benefits, loans and grants, and tax refunds.)

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

NA

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Income eligibility provisions were revised July 2001.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

Brochures, flyers are used to inform the public on the Certificate program. Community based agencies and DHS offices are distribution points. We do not aggressively promote the program since we have a sizable waiting list.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

NA

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

NA

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

The second phase of a statewide parent education campaign was conducted in Spring 2000, including public service announcements, paid announcements, billboards and brochures. Brochures were targeted to pediatrician offices and hospitals with birthing units.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Limited on-going outreach is conducted.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

NA

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

NA

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

NA

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

NA

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

NA

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

Extended hours of operation continue to be available.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

NA

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

NA

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

This activity continues to be a primary function of the child care assistance program.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Initiated a pilot program to evaluate 12 month eligibility period.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

NA

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

NA

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

NA

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

Tennessee currently pools funding sources and eligibility requirements are standardized for low-income eligible (non-TANF) families.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources tc assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

NA (on-going)

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

NA

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

NA

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

Continue to conduct annual survey with providers, clients and staff which measures both consumer and provider satisfaction and administrative performance.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

Established a comprehensive, web-based child care resource and referral directory. This web-based Resource and Referral directory allows for quick and easy access to child care provider information by child care consumers and other interested parties.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

State conducts an annual market rate survey and caps reimbursements at 70^{th} percentile. However, a tiered reimbursement rate structure has been established effective October 2001 to pay higher rates to subsidy providers based upon a quality child care rated licensing evaluation system.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

A bonus reimbursement rate program has been established effective October 2001 to pay higher rates to subsidy providers based upon a quality child care rated licensing evaluation system.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

NA

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

The Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation (TCCFC) fosters private-public sector partnerships to improve the availability and quality of child care. For example, through the corporate partnership grant program, TCCFC provided matching grant funds to child care agencies who had partnered with local communities, corporations or companies to provide child care services.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

NA

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

The Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation has shared information on these issues with employers at workshops, in newsletters, and in working with local Chambers of Commerce and civic organizations.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

The Corporate-Community Partnership program was established by the legislature in Spring 2000 to develop child care resources and improve child care quality. In 2001, this program will work with a community collaborative in Anderson County made up of local government, corporations, civic organizations, and higher education institutions to improve the quality of child care within this county.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation provides dollar for dollar matching funds for employers to invest in child care through the Corporate/Community Grant program.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

The Anderson County initiative mentioned in Action Step 8.4 includes child care benefits for employees and child care purchasing pool in their model.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

NA

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

NA

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

NA

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

NA

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

NA

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

NA

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

NA

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

NA

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

At the Federal level, Diane Rath, Chair of the Texas Workforce Commission, is a member of the Southern Institute and has actively participated in the policy recommendations formulated by that body. In addition, the State's Child Care Administrator has participated in the policy discussions and recommendations formulated by the American Public Human Services Association's (APHSA) Child Care Affiliate.

At the State level, the Commissioners and the Child Care Administrator have met with key, individual state elected officials, both prior to and during the 2001 legislative session, to educate them regarding the critical role child care services play in workforce development, enabling low-income families to secure and maintain employment and promoting school readiness among children, and of the current level of unmet need for subsidized child care services in the state. The Chair and Agency staff also provided testimony at legislative hearings on child care appropriations and initiatives. Texas Workforce Commission (Agency) staff have also been very active in analyzing proposed legislation with the authors, clarifying legislative intent, and educating them regarding possible, unintended implications of proposed statutory language.

Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

In Texas, the critical linkage between child care and the needs of working parents was recognized through the creation of local workforce development boards to manage employment and training services and provide support services, including subsidized child care. The local workforce boards consist of a majority of business representatives and are chaired by a business member, and they establish many local policies for the administration of CCDF services. State-level funds necessary to access Texas' entire allotment of unmatched federal child care funds are not appropriated, because the local workforce boards are expected to obtain local donations in order to secure remaining federal funds. The dollars are raised through private contributions, as well as contributions made through Employer Dependent Care Collaborations and other initiatives within individual communities. Workforce Boards, comprised of at least 51% business representatives, work to enlist local contributions to support community child care needs. Donations are used to meet federal match requirements and secure maximum federal funding. Employer Dependent Care Collaboration grants from the Agency promote employer participation and leadership in addressing access and quality issues.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

See federal level response to 1.1 above.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

See state level response to 1.1 above.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

Eligible Pre-K expenditures are certified to the maximum extent allowed, and local Boards enter into agreements with local, private and public entities for donated, transferred, and certified local funds to be used as state matching funds to draw down maximum federal CCDF dollars. A new Statewide Network of Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, created 6/15/2000, has initiated a statewide public awareness campaign in support of families who need child care assistance. Goals of the CCR&R Network include capacity building and ensuring that every parent in Texas has easy access to reliable information on child care services in their respective local communities.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

N/A

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

Individuals, including students, enrolled in Choices (TANF Employment) Services are the highest priority for subsidized child care statewide. Students who are teen parents are given a high priority by most of the State's 28 workforce development boards.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

N/A

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Texas does not use assets test in calculating income eligibility.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

N/A

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

The Agency provides information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, including internet access, a general information and technical assistance line, and brochures available at the 144 workforce centers across the state. The Boards are also required to provide parents with a consumer guide to child care providers within the workforce area. Employer Dependent Care Collaboration grants have been used to produce child care brochures and fact sheets on finding and choosing child care in 17 communities throughout the state. Some Workforce Centers are connected with their area Child Care Resource and Referral agency to provide child care information to parents. The Statewide CCR&R Network has initiated a public awareness campaign to refer parents to child care information services in their communities, and to expand access to these services to parents in every county in the state.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

Information on websites and in brochures developed both at the state and local levels, and targeted both to employers and families, is provided in customer friendly language and formats. The Agency does periodic checks of the information available on the website and updates the brochures as needed. Both the Agency and the Boards have staff that are bilingual in Spanish and English and can provide information as needed. Boards also provide interpreter services for other languages when necessary.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

The Board's provide training on customer service, and their client services personnel are expected to provide information in an informative and professional manner that respects the dignity of each prospective applicant.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

The Agency requires the local workforce development boards to recruit, train and maintain a sufficient number of providers to offer parents a full range of categories of care and types of providers. The Child Care Contractor staff also provide parents with a local consumer guide that lists of all eligible providers, explains the differences between the different types of providers, and indicates which providers offer transportation services, swimming on site, field trips, etc. The staff also give parents information on Texas Rising Star Providers, those providers that voluntarily meet quality criteria that exceed the state's minimum licensing standards for child care facilities.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

Staff in the Agency's Child Care Department actively participate in 6-8 statewide child care committees or task forces with the purpose of identifying opportunities for sharing child care information with Workforce Board staff at the local level. Groups include the Texas I Am Your Child Network, Adult and Child Nutrition Advisory Committee, Advisory Committee to Texas Early Childhood Intervention, Child Care Resource Groups, Registry of Parent Trainers, Texas Information and Referral Advisory Committee, the United Way of Texas child care conference, planning committee, and the State Head Start Collaboration project. At the local level, Boards have child care advisory committees comprised of representatives from school districts, community colleges, Head Start, employers, early childhood education programs, child care providers CCR&R contractors, and related community-based organizations.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

In addition to the activities cited in the foregoing action steps under Goal 3, information on child care services and the application process is available at the 144 workforce centers across the state, and Boards are required to coordinate child care rule making and planning activities with agencies of local government and providers of other early childhood programs at the local level.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

Texas already has a simplified application process.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

This system is already in place in Texas.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

For families referred for child care services by staff from TANF Employment, Food Stamp Employment and Training, Workforce Investment Act, and Welfare-to-Work services, initial eligibility is determined by staff in those services, and child care intake workers do no further documentation.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

This has been done in Texas for many years.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

The majority of Child Care Contractors offer a toll-free phone lines for the clients. The Child Care Contractors offer non-conventional hours of operation during peak enrollment periods, including weekend and extended weekday hours.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

The Lead Agency's Rules allow local Boards to set their own policies in this area. Some Boards do presumptive eligibility.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

This system has been in place in Texas for a number of years.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

Contractors' client services staff have been providing this service for a number of years.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

Each of the State's 28 Workforce Boards establishes their own re-determination periods. Many of those Boards have instituted a 12-month period.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

N/A

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

This system has been in place in Texas for a number of years.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

Recent legislation enacted by the Texas Legislature requires that children co-enrolled in Pre-K or Head Start and child care services will remain eligible for child care services without eligibility re-determination as long as they or enrolled in the Head Start or Pre-K program.

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

This system has been in place in Texas for several years.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

Each local Board is required to collaborate with public and private programs in the workforce area to maximize resources and stabilize early child care services for children and their families. See response the Action Step 3.5 above.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

In Texas, the staff that complete the eligibility determinations are employed by Child Care Contractors. Child Care Contractors are contracted entities with the Local Workforce Development Boards. The training of these staff are primary the responsibility of the contractor and the Board. The Agency provides an email address and a telephone number that is available Monday – Friday for all technical assistance questions and/or concerns that may arise with the child care program. Child Care Services staff are available to provide on-site technical assistance for training on Federal regulations, TWC rules and policy interpretation.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

Applications may be taken and available services discussed at multiple sites, and face-to-face interviews are not required.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

During the state fiscal year that ended 8-31-01, the Agency performed a child care "mystery shopper" survey in which Agency staff went incognito to workforce centers across the state posing as parents applying for subsidized child care. The survey focused on the overall quality of customer services. Results were shared with the respective Boards. In addition, 16 of the Boards have conducted their own customer satisfaction surveys, generally via a follow-up questionnaire. Those results have been used by the Boards to determine resource and staff training needs.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

TWC provides grants to most of the state's 10 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies for special activities targeting employer support for child care. In addition, $1 million a year supports the Statewide CCR&R Network, which expands agency capacity to serve parents, collects data on child care supply and demand, and has initiated a statewide child care public awareness campaign.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

Market rate surveys are conducted annually and are a major consideration in the reimbursement rates established by the local Boards.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

All child care policies established at the local Board level, including reimbursement rates, are developed through a public process and must be approved by the Board, which is comprised of a variety of stakeholders, including providers. Each Board's child care advisory committee is also comprised of a variety of stakeholders, including providers and parents.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

Agreements between each Board's child care contractor and individual providers that agree to accept subsidized children require the provider to charge the parents no more than the Board's established parent co-pay amount.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

A 5-year effort to provide information to employers and promote their leadership in community child care issues provides grants to communities, primarily for administrative costs. Employers identify child care improvement projects to undertake, then pay for them with donations. These projects have provided a return on the state's investment of 200 to 300 percent each year.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

At the Regional Conference of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral agencies in Houston in July 2001, 80 Texas employers received recognition and an engraved award for their work-family practices. These employers often serve as mentors to other business leaders. Over 100 employers throughout the state have supported the Employer Dependent Care Collaborations, many of which were initiated with grants from the CCDF Lead Agency. Participating employers include many Fortune 500 companies.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

The website of the Work & Family Clearinghouse at the Lead Agency and staff at the website e-mail address, field messages from employers and workers about tax benefits and other programs and policies to support families in the workplace and the community. A link from the Lead Agency's website to the State Comptroller's office provides information and instructions for obtaining an employer-tax credit for on-site child care services.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

Employer Dependent Care Collaborations are employer-led, community level groups, which study local child, care systems. They propose improvements to the child care system in order to align services to workforce needs. When employers of the group have selected a project to fund, they provide donations to cover the costs. The Lead Agency provides grants to these groups to start-up or expand their activities. As of August 2001, 17 such Collaborations are operational.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

Local funds raised by employers to make improvements to the child care system through Employer Dependent Care Collaborations are eligible for federal match consideration by Local Workforce Boards. Many boards have utilized the funds to meet local match goals.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

A tax credit was enacted by the Texas Legislature in 1999 as an incentive for employers to provide child care at the business site or to provide vouchers to employees to help defray child care costs.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

Employer Dependent Care Collaboration grants pay primarily administrative costs for these employer-led initiatives. Grants range from $35,000 - $150,000/year.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

N/A

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

N/A

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

N/A

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

N/A

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

N/A

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

The Agency has promoted the state employer child care tax credit for on-site child care services and after-school programs by linking the TWC website to the State Comptroller's website, which offers instructions for qualifying for and obtaining the tax credit. The TWC Commissioners promote the employer child care tax credit through agency newsletters and conferences.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

See response to Action Step 5.2

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

Texas participated in the survey of 17 southern states conducted by the Southern Institute during calendar year 2000.

Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey on the Status of Implementation Efforts
September 2001

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Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

In October 2000, a booklet was developed called "Child Care in West Virginia – Then and Now (Improving Affordability, Availability and Quality in Child Care). The book demonstrated the state's progress in child care but also indicated the program improvements that were needed. It was distributed to the state Legislators, the Department Secretary and Commissioner. While not a "call to action", it was a formal attempt to educate state policymakers on child care.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

In 10/2000, WV used TANF funding to increase child care eligibility guidelines from 150% to 200% of FY2000 FPL. While still not at 85% of State Median Income, WV was serving the highest percentage of SMI of any state in Region 2. However, TANF funding may not be available, or not available at the current level, in future fiscal years. It will not be possible to sustain eligibility guidelines without TANF funding.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

In 3/2001, key WV officials from Health and Human Resources, Education, Education and the Arts, and Cabinet on Children and Families met with Regional ACF staff to discuss collaboration and partnering for maximizing efficient use of resources, producing more effective services, and improving learning outcomes for children. A joint letter was sent to local schools, child care programs, and Head Start agencies to encourage local collaboration. This partnerships group continues to plan for better collaboration.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

Since 1991, WV has followed the recommendation of establishing co-payments that do not exceed 10% of gross family income.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

WV has provided child care assistance to students as far back as the 1970's and has not changed that policy.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

In 8/2000, WV implemented policy that exempts the following sources of income:

- Subsidy adoption payments
- Income of approved foster parents

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

Since the 1970's, WV's child care program has excluded assets from the determination of eligibility for child care.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

- On May 1, 2000, the Child Care Division launched a child care web site that contains information on eligibility requirements, policy and contact information for the child care resource and referral agencies that handle eligibility determinations.
- In the summer of 2001, two of the CCR&R agencies launched a media campaign, obtaining TV coverage which resulted in substantial increase in the number of families receiving child care in two of WV's largest cities.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

- In 1992, WV piloted the use of CCR&R agencies to determine eligibility for child care services. We moved statewide in 1999. Parents therefore do not have the stigma of going to DHHR to obtain child care services.
- One of the CCR&R agencies is piloting the use of the term " scholarship" rather than "subsidy".

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

- The state's network of CCR&R agencies provide consumer education pieces that they have developed.
- The state has a "Child Care Workbook" that is available to all CCR&R agencies that is designed to help families seek care.
- A database of all licensed child care centers has been developed and is ready to be put on the State's web page, pending the change-over to a new server.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

The Child Care Division has worked with a coordinating body – the Governor's Early Childhood Implementation Commission since 1991. The Commission meets quarterly and coordinates many of the state's early childhood initiatives. Members of the Commission include representatives of child care, Head Start, Birth to Three, Education, as well as parents, provides, advocacy agencies. The commission serves multiple purposes, but many people come to find out what is happening in early childhood and they spread the word. Relationships are built that encourage collaboration.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

Many of the above named entities are members of the Early Childhood Implementation Commission, so they receive information on any changes in the child care program, at least quarterly, as well as updates on the CCDF State Plan that shows eligibility guidelines, entities providing eligibility determination and other quality initiatives.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

Since January 2000, the state has increased the number of CCR&R offices from 16 to 20 and another site is planned. The CCR&R agencies are required to offer outreach sites in each of the state's remaining counties one day per week.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

In December 2000, the agency changed policy to require the CCR&R worker to explain the importance of continuity of care and the detrimental effects of frequent changes of provider to all parents during the intake interview.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

Since approximately 1998, WV has continued full subsidy for 4 weeks if the family loses employment and wishes to seek other employment.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

- Since the implementation of the Family Support Act in 1988, WV has continued to operate a "seamless" system. All available state and federal child care funds are managed by same agency and a generic application exists that determines the source of funds to use.
- In December 2000, policy was changed to guarantee eligibility for the six month period, regardless of changes in the parent's eligibility, although parents are still required to report those changes to insure the Department has current information on the family.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

NA

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

The Child Care Division has worked collaboratively with the State's new pilot program, Educare, as far as planning, selection of sites and funding. The Department pays for the cost of care for eligible families in Child Care and the Educare program supplements the quality of those programs based on quality standards.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

- Eligibility staff in the CCR&R agencies are required to have a four-year degree in one of the following fields – social work, early care & education or related fields.
- West Virginia has little diversity as far as language is concerned.
- While eligibility staff still collects information for the application, the applicant information is entered in the state's management information system. In early 2000, the state's information system was revised to automate the eligibility determination process, leaving less room for mistakes.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

- In early 2000, WV issued a statewide CCR&R grant announcement that indicated a caseload of clients should be no more than 250 cases. CCR&R staff increased their budgets in order to hire additional eligibility staff.
- In October 2000, policy was changed to require a decision on eligibility within two weeks of application, rather than 30 days.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

The Child Care Division has developed a survey for parents and providers that will be piloted in October 2001 as part of a planned review of the state's six CR&R agencies. Surveys will go out by CCR&R region. The decision has not been made whether or not the survey will be sent to the full population or a randomly selected sample.

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

WV has been steadily increasing its investment in CCR&R agencies, which serve as the state's major infrastructure for eligibility determination, provider training, technical assistance and resource and referral. From 2000 to 2001, we increased grants to CCR&R agencies from $5.5 million to $7.7 million. The increase was due to reductions in the caseload size, increases in the number of eligible families, and the addition of two new technical assistance positions – a behavior support position and a family child care mentor position.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

In October 2000, the state increased reimbursement rates to the 75th percentile of the 1999 market rate. The new market rate survey done in June 2001 shows regular reimbursement rates are below the 75th percentile. However, the state offers a supplemental rate for accredited programs of $4 daily.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

In 1998, the state started an incentive rate of $1 per day for providers that care for children during non-traditional work hours. That rate increased to $4 in October 2000. This incentive rate has made it much easier for families to locate caregivers for evening, overnight and weekend care.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

The state enters into a provider agreement that indicates the provider agrees to accept the department's payment as full reimbursement for child care services. However, we do allow providers to charge late fees if parents leave children past closing time. We have also allowed reasonable registration fees and transportation fees, which we consider outside of the normal child care services.

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

- In August 2000, the Child Care Division developed a display for the annual State Chamber of Commerce summit that utilized the materials developed by the Child Care Partnership project and added state information. The display offered a variety of hand-outs for employers, a Power Point presentation and a video developed by the Child Care Partnership Project. All materials have been duplicated and distributed to the CCR&R agencies for use with local businesses.

- In September 2001, a book on "Family Friendly" Practice was developed in conjunction with the WV Governor's Cabinet on Children & Families, the WV Chamber of Commerce, the Wellness Council and the Department. The effort is designed to educate employers on the benefits of child and elder care to the business community and provides ways they can contribute to develop, expand and support child care programs.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

The information presented at the August 2000 Business Summit contains a section on tax benefits for employers that contains all of the information listed in action step 8.3. The current grant agreement with the state's six CCR&R agencies requires them to use these materials to work with local businesses.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

Some of the new Educare program sites have built on our sliding fee scale to provide services to families that are above the State's eligibility. We feel this is an encouraging step and hope that other sites will follow their example.

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

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